NATION

30 Delhi schools receive bomb threat

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BUSINESS

Mkt stages strong comeback amid easing inflation

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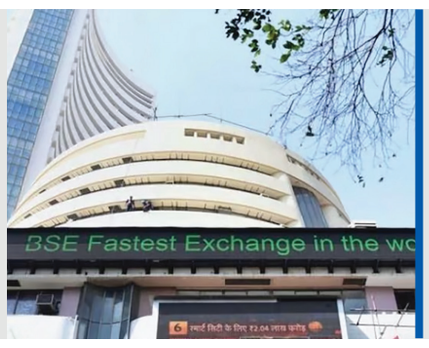

SPORTS

Gukesh's day as World Champion: Trophy & stardom

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Cong hijacked Constitution: Rajnath; It's not Sangh's rulebook: Priyanka

Day 1 of Constitution debate sees Priyanka's maiden speech in Parliament

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Lok Sabha on Friday witnessed heated exchanges between the Opposition and treasury benches with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh alleging Congress always chose power over Constitution, drawing a sharp counter from Priyanka Gandhi Vadra who accused BJP of breaking the 'suraksha kavach' that the Constitution provided.

It always tried to "hijack and appropriate" the framing of the Constitution, Singh said, highlighting the imposition of Emergency, dismissal of many state governments and superseding of Supreme Court judges for "standing up" to the then Indira Gandhi government to charge the party with violating constitutional principles.

Initiating a two-day debate in Lok Sabha on "Discussion on the Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India", Singh alleged that Congress never tolerated autonomy of institutions and tried to destroy constitutional principles and spirit.

> **What is your responsibility? Or does all the responsibility lie with Nehru ji. His name can be erased from the books, but his role in the Independence struggle can never be erased** -Priyanka Gandhi, Cong MP

Singh said the Congress, during its decades in power, often amended the Constitution with a "malicious" spirit to change it gradually, while the Narendra Modi government has affected amendments to strengthen its fundamental values and for people's empowerment.

After Singh spoke, Priyanka Gandhi made her maiden speech and alleged that it seems Modi has not understood that it is 'Bharat ka Samvidhan' and not 'Sangh ka Vidhan'.

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi

BJP MP Rajnath Singh

Had it not been for the Lok Sabha poll results, the ruling party would have started changing the Constitution, the newly-elected Wayanad MP said.

Congress has been claiming that the BJP has sought to change the Constitution in case they got a majority.

> **Oppn leaders keep the Constitution in their pockets. This is what they have learnt from childhood, they have seen their families keep the Constitution in their pockets for generations** - Rajnath Singh, BJP MP

Priyanka Gandhi highlighted the BJP's alleged attempts to change the Constitution, "growing monopoly" of the Adani Group, atrocities on women, incidents of violence in Sambhal and Manipur, and the demand for a nationwide caste census.

Taking a jibe at Singh, she said those in the ruling party often talk about the past but they should tell the country what they are doing currently.

Countering criticism of the Emergency, she said the BJP should learn from it and apologise for its mistakes. *—PTI*

RENUKASWAMY'S MURDER

Darshan, Pavithra, 7 others get bail

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

High Court on Friday granted bail to Kannada film actor Darshan Thoogudeepa in the murder of Renukaswamy. The actor, along with his friend Pavithra Gowda and seven others, received bail while still in custody.

Darshan was arrested on 11 June this year, accused of murdering 33-year-old Renukaswamy, allegedly in retaliation for sending obscene messages to Gowda. Initially held at Parappana Agrahara Jail in Bengaluru, he was transferred to Ballari Central Jail following the emergence of a photograph showing him casually relaxing with fellow inmates. Currently, he is hospitalised due to back pain.

Renukaswamy's body was discovered near a drain in Sumanahalli on 9 June, showing signs of multiple injuries. Initial investigations indicated he was abducted from Chitradurga and subjected to severe torture before his death. Four individuals initially surrendered to the police, confessing responsibility for the murder over a financial dispute. However, inconsistencies in their statements led to suspicions of a larger conspiracy involving Darshan, Gowda, and 15 others. After Darshan's arrest in Mysuru on 11 June 2024, all suspects were taken into custody and presented before the court by 16 June. Renukaswamy's father, Kashinath Shivanagouda, expressed faith in the judiciary, emphasising a belief that the accused would ultimately be punished. *—PTI*

RBI gets threat email of 'IED' in Mumbai building

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

Reserve Bank of India has received a threat email claiming that an improvised explosive device (IED) has been planted in its building in south Mumbai, a police official said on Friday. The message was sent to the official email address of the RBI Governor on Thursday following which the authorities at the central bank alerted the police. The sender is yet to be unidentified, the official said. In the email written in Russian language, the sender claimed that an IED had been planted in the building and it would be activated remotely within five days. *—PTI*

Maharashtra Cabinet expansion on 15 December

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

The cabinet expansion of the BJP-led Maharashtra government would take place on 15 December with the new ministers taking the oath of office at a ceremony in Nagpur, official sources said on Friday. About 30 ministers would take oath, a senior BJP leader told PTI. The week-long winter session of the state legislature is slated to begin in Nagpur, Maharashtra's second capital, from 16 December. Devendra Fadnavis took oath as Chief Minister with Shiv Sena leader Eknath shinde and NCP chief Ajit Pawar as his deputies in Mumbai on 5 December. *—PTI*

No 1st come 1st serve for satellite spectrum: Scindia

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Union Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scinida on Friday asserted that satellite spectrum allocation will not be assigned on a first come first serve basis - the contentious way through which radiowaves were allotted for 2G services. While speaking at the India Economic Conclave, the Minister said that it is not possible to auction spectrum for satellite service due to the science associated with it and no country has auctioned the radio waves for the same. *—PTI*

Somashekhar, Hebbar defy BJP's walkout plan

BELAGAVI, 13 DEC

- Somashekhar initially stayed behind, followed by Hebbar, both of whom have been regarded as 'rebels' within the BJP ranks.

In a display of dissent, two BJP MLAs, ST Somashekhar and Shivaram Hebbar, remained in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly while their colleagues staged a walkout in protest against the ruling Congress party's conduct during a heated session.

The BJP legislators walked out after Congress members allegedly attempted to obstruct Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka from raising the contentious Waqf issue. Tensions escalated when Congress MLA PM Narendra Swamy, along with others, sought to address allegations against BJP MLA N Munirathna, accusing him of making casteist comments.

Following the Speaker UT Khader granting Ashoka the opportunity to discuss the Waqf issue, Narendraswamy and fellow Congress members insisted on addressing Munirathna's case, claiming that such remarks were intolerable. Amid these developments, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda also sought to speak on the damage caused by recent rains.

Frustrated by the ruling party's actions, Ashoka led his colleagues in a walkout, criticising the government. However, Somashekhar initially stayed behind, followed by Hebbar, both of whom have been regarded as 'rebels' within the BJP ranks. The state BJP's core committee has previously indicated plans for disciplinary action against the duo.

Eventually, the BJP members returned to the Assembly to allow discussion on the Waqf issue. *—PTI*

TECHIE'S SUICIDE: PIL IN SC SEEKS REFORMS IN LAWS

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

In the wake of a techie's suicide in Bengaluru, a public interest litigation (PIL) has been filed in the Supreme Court, calling for the establishment of an expert committee to evaluate and reform current dowry and domestic violence laws to prevent their misuse.

The PIL, submitted by advocate Vishal Tiwari, proposes the formation of a committee comprising former Supreme Court judges, legal experts, and practitioners to scrutinise existing legislation related to dowry and domestic violence. It also requests that marriage registrations include detailed records of gifts or articles exchanged. Furthermore, the plea seeks to enforce observations made by the apex court in a 2010 ruling, which highlighted the misuse of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that addresses cruelty by a husband or his relatives. *—PTI*

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DOCTORS FUME

Former principal of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital Sandip Ghosh (Centre) ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ex-cop, Ghosh get bail in RG Kar case

KOLKATA, 13 DEC

The Sealdah court on Friday granted bail to former officer-in-charge of Tala police station Abhijit Mondal and RG Kar hospital ex-principal Sandip Ghosh in the rape and murder case of doctor at the medical facility.

The additional chief judicial magistrate (ACJM) granted bail to duo as the chargesheet against them was not filed within the mandatory 90-day period, a lawyer representing Ghosh said.

The court granted bail to Ghosh and Mondal on bail bonds of Rs 2,000 each and directed them to cooperate with the investigation.

While Mondal was accused of alleged delay in filing of FIR in the case, Ghosh was charged with tampering of evidence.

The post-graduate trainee was raped and murdered, and her body was found in the seminar room of the state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on 9 August.

Ghosh and Mondal were arrested by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is investigating the case on an order of the Calcutta High Court.

> **We thought the CBI would speed up the investigation and bring those responsible to justice. But now, with the accused being granted bail, it feels like the system is failing us**
>
> —Mother of the victim

Mondal's lawyer told reporters outside the court that he will walk out of the correctional home where he is incarcerated on judicial remand.

Ghosh, who is on judicial remand in another case of alleged financial irregularities at RG Kar hospital, will, however, remain behind bars despite being granted bail in the rape-murder case. The junior doctors, who led a months-long protest over the rape, expressed disappointment with the CBI investigation into the case. *—PTI*

Francois Bayrou
PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Centrist Bayrou is France's new PM

PARIS, 13 DEC

French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday named centrist ally Francois Bayrou as prime minister in an effort to address the country's deep political crisis, after a historic parliamentary vote ousted the previous government last week.

Bayrou, 73, a crucial partner in Macron's centrist alliance, has been a well-known figure in French politics for decades. His political experience is seen as key in efforts to restore stability as no single party holds a majority at the National Assembly.

Macron's office said in a statement that Bayrou "has been charged with forming a new government."

Former Prime Minister Michel Barnier resigned last week following a no-confidence vote prompted by budget disputes in the National Assembly, leaving France without a functioning government. Macron in an address to the nation vowed to remain in office until his term ends in 2027.

Bayrou is expected to hold talks with political leaders from various parties in the coming days in order to choose new ministers.

The task appears challenging because Macron's centrist alliance does not have a majority in parliament and Bayrou's Cabinet will need to rely on moderate lawmakers from both the left and right to be able to stay in power. *—PTI*

6 die in hospital fire, TN CM gives ₹3L aid

CHENNAI, 13 DEC

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday condoled the death of six persons in a fire at a private hospital in Dindigul district and announced an ex-gratia of Rs three lakh each to the next of kin.

The CM expressed his sympathies with the families of the victims that included a minor girl. Two other deceased persons hailed from Theni district.

In a statement, Stalin announced a sum of Rs three lakh from the Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund (CMPRF) to the families of the victims.

He also extended assistance of Rs one lakh each to those under treatment in the intensive care unit (ICU) with serious injuries and Rs 50,000 to persons with simple injuries.

He further said he has directed that the best medical treatment be provided to those admitted in nearby government and private hospitals.

Official sources in Dinidgul said three persons were currently under treatment in ICU.

On Thursday, around 9.30 pm, a blaze erupted in the private hospital, leaving six dead. The victims were found unconscious in a lift and were declared dead by doctors at a hospital. They had suffocated to death, police and fire officials said. *—PTI*

OVER STAMPEDE DEATH

Allu Arjun arrested, gets jail & bail in 4 hours

Allu Arjun smiles as he is arrested by police. In a video, Arjun is seen sipping coffee ***PHOTO: X***

HYDERABAD, 13 DEC

Telugu superstar Allu Arjun was arrested on Friday, sent to 14-day judicial custody by a local court here in the death of a woman in a stampede during the premiere of 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' and granted 4 week interim bail by the Telangana High Court— all in less than five hours.

The high-profile arrest also triggered a political slugfest with the BJP and BRS lashing out at the ruling Congress in Telangana, questioning the treatment meted out to the star.

Some drama ensued when police descended at the residence of the national award-winning actor as visuals showed him purportedly arguing with a cop and objecting to them for coming up to his bedroom.

A woman died and her was hospitalised on 4 December during a stampede-like situation at the Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad when thousands of fans jostled to have a glimpse of the actor at the premiere of the movie.

High Court judge Justice J Sridevi directed him to submit a surety of Rs 50,000 to jail authorities.

Arjun's legal teams argued that the theatre management informed the police well in advance about the actors' programme and sought security and traffic management.

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister visited the family of actor Allu Arjun in Hyderabad. Arjun is the nephew of Pawan Kalyan's eldest brother, actor Chiranjeevi. *—PTI*

Couple, whose kids gave piggy bank to RaGa, kills self

BHOPAL, 13 DEC

A businessman and his wife hanged themselves in the Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh on Friday, triggering sharp exchanges between Congress and ruling BJP.

Congress claimed that victims Manoj Parmar and his wife were party supporters and the Enforcement Directorate harassed them over their political leanings. The couple's children had gifted their piggybank to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during his "Bharat Jodo (Nyaya) Yatra", said the party's MP chief Jitu Patwari.

BJP hit back at the opposition party, accusing it of "playing politics over death".

Police said Parmar and his wife died by suicide in the Ashta town in the morning. Meanwhile, ED's Bhopal zonal official said that the agency carried out search operations on 5 December at four premises in Sehore and Indore under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. The search covered the residential premises of the five key people. *—PTI*

75th Mahamasthakabhisheka ritual of anointing the statue of Gomateshwara in Mysuru with sacred liquid was held on Friday *PHOTO: SALAR*

City police bust fake bail surety racket, 13 nabbed

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

The Halasuru Gate police have dismantled a significant operation involving fraudulent sureties for court bail applications, resulting in the arrest of 13 individuals. The operation revealed the utilisation of counterfeit documents to mislead both the judiciary and property owners. The investigation was initiated following a tip-off regarding individuals exploiting forged Aadhaar cards, property documents such as Pahani and mutation registers, which were submitted as surety for accused persons at the Magistrate Court on Nrupatunga Road. Officers detained five suspects in possession of these fake documents. Interrogation of the detainees unveiled a larger network, leading to the apprehension of seven additional individuals. Police later arrested four suspects near Mysore Bank Circle and one from a cyber centre in Majestic, while two more were traced to a lodge in Majestic, possessing incriminating materials. *—Salar News*

City cops nab 2, seize 261.5kg of sandalwood

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

In two separate operations, the City Police arrested two suspects involved in sandalwood smuggling and seized a total of 261.5kg of sandalwood worth Rs 19.6 lakh. In the first incident, the Subramanyapura Police intercepted a mini truck on the Uttarahalli-Kanakapura main road. They arrested a suspect and seized 146.3 kg of sandalwood worth approximately Rs 14.6 lakh. The suspect confessed to cutting sandalwood trees from the forests of Kodagu, Virajpet and Siddapur. City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said, "Two suspects in this case are still at large. Efforts are on to apprehend them." In another case, Jnanabharathi Police arrested one person involved in stealing sandalwood trees from the Bengaluru University campus in the city. When security officers approached, four people who were cutting a sandalwood tree on the campus fled, leaving behind tools and a mobile phone. Police traced one suspect to Ramanagara district. *—PTI*

CM defends action against Panchamasali protesters

Can't overlook unlawful behaviour, says Siddaramaiah

VIJAYAPURA, 13 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah defended the police's use of lathicharge against Panchamasali protesters, asserting that the government cannot overlook unlawful behaviour that disrupts public order.

The clash occurred on Tuesday in Belagavi, where a section of the Panchamasali community, led by Kudalasangama Math's pontiff Basava Jayamruthyunjaya Swami, attempted to besiege the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha. The demonstration escalated into violence, injuring several participants and police officers, necessitating a response from law enforcement.

Siddaramaiah acknowledged the community's request for inclusion in the 2A reservation category, which provides 15 per cent reservation in education and government employment, in contrast to their current status in the 3B category that offers only 5 per cent. He emphasised that while peaceful protests are welcomed, any actions that disrupt public order will not be tolerated.

The clash occurred on Tuesday in Belagavi, where Panchamasali community members attempted to besiege Suvarna Vidhana Soudha *PHOTO: PTI*

"The government will not condone individuals taking the law into their own hands," he stated during a press briefing, urging the community to exercise restraint.

He reiterated that all citizens, regardless of their status, are subject to the law.

In response to allegations from opposition parties that police resorted to stone-pelting during the protests, Siddaramaiah claimed evidence contradicts this assertion.

"If the protesters had not engaged in throwing stones, how did over 20 police officers sustain injuries? Did the police themselves throw the stones?" he questioned, insisting he had photographic evidence of the agitation.

The Chief Minister advised the Panchamasali community to channel their demands through the Permanent Commission for Backward Classes, outlining a path for their grievances to be officially recognised and addressed. Siddaramaiah reaffirmed that the government will act in accordance with the Constitution in handling such matters. *—PTI*

UNEVEN SHOWERS

'Above normal' rains killed 133 this year: Minister

BELAGAVI, 13 DEC

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told the Legislative Assembly on Friday that 133 people have died this year because of "above-normal" rains in the State and outlined the government's efforts to provide immediate relief and long-term solutions.

"The State has received 20 per cent above-normal rainfall this year, but it was uneven, with some areas receiving less rain. A total of 133 people have lost their lives due to rains and related incidents in the State this year, and Rs 5 lakh compensation has been paid to the families of the deceased, totalling Rs 6.64 crore," Gowda said.

Further, 714 livestock losses have been reported, and a compensation of Rs 1.2 crore has been paid, he added.

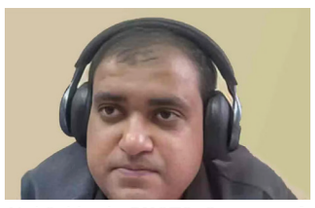
"Kharif crops were damaged across nearly 1.6 lakh hectares, with Rs 94.94 crore in compensation paid. Rabi crops on over 1.45 lakh hectares also suffered damage, and compensation of Rs 112.17 crore is being processed," he said.

Krishna Byre Gowda *PHOTO: SALAR*

In addition, 20,893 houses were damaged in rains, including 3,200 that were completely destroyed, the minister said, adding that the government has paid Rs 82.20 crore as compensation for damaged houses.

Gowda said the total compensation for rain-related damages this year amounted to Rs 297 crore. *—PTI*

Wife summoned in techie suicide case



Atul Subhash *PHOTO: Screengrab*

> **My son used to say that there is a lot of corruption but he will fight as he is on the path of truth...He was broken from inside, though he didn't tell anyone anything**
>
> -Pawan Kumar, Atul Subhash's father

BENGALURU, 13 DEC:

The City Police have issued a summons to Nikita Singhania, the estranged wife of software engineer Atul Subhash, as part of their investigation into his recent suicide. Atul, aged 34, died earlier this week, prompting heightened scrutiny into the circumstances surrounding his death.

Police Commissioner B Dayananda announced at a press conference on Friday that two dedicated teams have been tasked with investigating the case, which was spurred by a complaint lodged by Atul's brother, Bikash Kumar.

The complaint has led to a registered case of abetment to suicide against Nikita and her family.

A Bengaluru police team, led by sub-inspector Sanjeet Kumar, attempted to deliver the summons to Nikita at her residence in Khowa Mandi, Uttar Pradesh, but found the home locked. They have since collaborated with local authorities to locate her. Commissioner Dayananda confirmed that police resources have been mobilised in Uttar Pradesh to ensure compliance, including the establishment of a police camp for ongoing monitoring.

The tragic circumstances surrounding Atul's death have incited nationwide outrage, spurring protests in Bengaluru led by the Save India Family Foundation, with demonstrators demanding justice and stricter legal measures to prevent similar incidents. Atul's suicide note reportedly alleged harassment by his wife and her family.

While the summons specifically targets Nikita Singhania, other family members named in the FIR remain unaddressed. *—Salar News*

HANUMAN ON THE GO

Artists dressed as Lord Hanuman celebrate Hanuman Jayanthi near Patala Anjaneya Swamy temple in Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: SALAR*

BJP office-bearer held for alleged job scam

BELAGAVI, 13 DEC

Akash Athanikar, convener of BJP Khanapur legal cell in Belagavi taluk, has been remanded in judicial custody for allegedly defrauding individuals by issuing fake government job appointments. The accused reportedly targeted Anganwadi and ASHA workers, presenting them with counterfeit appointment letters.

According to reports, Athanikar issued fraudulent appointment letters to two women from Khanapur taluk, claiming they had secured positions as Anganwadi teachers. The documents bore forged letterheads matching official government formats, complete with the round seal of the appointing authority and signatures.

The scandal was uncovered when one of the victims approached local resident Jayaram Hemmannavar, who subsequently filed a complaint with the Khanapur police. Following a thorough investigation, the police formalised charges against Athanikar, leading to his detention in Belagavi Jail.

The fake appointment letters instructed the women to report to an office in Bengaluru for further formalities, where they ultimately realised they had been deceived. *—Salar News*

Two families boycotted for inter-caste marriage

MYSURU, 13 DEC

In Lingarajapura village, Chamarajnagar taluk, two families from the Uppara community have endured a year-long social boycott, allegedly due to their support for inter-caste marriage and the construction of a home contrary to village elders' directives.

Siddaraju, one of the affected individuals, said his family has faced ostracism since his daughter chose to marry outside their community. He claimed that community leaders demanded a fine of Rs. 65,000 for this inter-caste marriage and threatened to impose an additional Rs 1.2 lakh fine if his daughter attempted to return to the village. Siddaraju said his wife's health has deteriorated due to the emotional strain caused by the social boycott.

Although he filed a complaint regarding the social boycott, he noted that visits from senior officials, including the additional superintendent of police and the additional deputy commissioner, had not resulted in any meaningful resolution.

Chamarajanagar Deputy Commissioner Shilpa Nag instructed police and social welfare officials to investigate the situation and provide a report. She assured that the district administration would take appropriate action based on the findings. *—Salar News*

State govt commits to tackling maternal healthcare, deaths

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

State Health Department on Friday assured the public of its proactive commitment to taking all possible measures to prevent maternal deaths in government hospitals.

To strengthen specialist services and address the critical need for expert care, permissions have been granted to appoint Diplomate of National Board (DNB) specialists in district and taluk hospitals, significantly improving access to specialist services.

Prioritising critical posts, filling essential positions in Gynecology and Obstetrics,

including in-service OBGs, has been a key focus to ensure seamless maternal healthcare services across the state.

In a statement, the health department said revised salaries and incentives have been introduced to attract and retain skilled healthcare professionals, ensuring high-quality care across all regions.

"We have strengthened Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs) and Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) by adding more beds and resources. Furthermore, an additional 450 Maternal and Child Health (MCH) beds have been sanctioned in the FY 2023-24 and 2024-25," it stated.

Health officials stated that comprehensive strategies to manage high-risk pregnancies are being implemented in all district hospitals, with focused efforts to reduce maternal and neonatal complications. *—PTI*

Govt betrayed OBCs, says BJP

MYSURU, 13 DEC

The district unit of the BJP's OBC Morcha on Friday protested near Gandhi Square in Mysuru on Friday, accusing the State government of betraying the Other Backward Classes (OBC) by not releasing grants to boards and development corporations.

They said lakhs of OBC students were deprived of scholarship, while digging borewells under Ganga Kalyan schemes for marginal land owners and distribution of loans and grants for the OBC community have stopped. This is betrayal of the poor and the AHINDA community, they said. *—Salar News*

KEY MILESTONE

ISRO moves Gaganyaan parts to launch complex

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

ISRO announced on Friday that it has achieved a significant milestone for the Gaganyaan programme with the first solid motor segment moved from the production plant to the launch complex.

The announcement came days after the space agency conducted 'well deck' recovery trials of the Gaganyaan with the Indian Navy on 6 December.

The space agency said the well deck in a ship can be flooded with water so that boats, landing crafts, recovered spacecraft can be taken inside to dock within the ship.

Gaganyaan, India's first human space mission, is one of the projects approved by the Union Cabinet.

Gaganyaan project envisages demonstration of human spaceflight capability by launching crew of three members to an orbit of 400 km for a three-day mission and bringing them back safely to Earth. *—PTI*

PALACE LAND CASE

BBMP, Revenue Dept spar over Rs 3,000 cr to Wadiyars

BENGALURU, 13, DEC:

Supreme Court's directive to the State earlier this week to give Rs 3,000 crore compensation to the Mysuru royal family—Wadiyars—for acquiring 15 acres of land on Jayamahal and Ballari Roads has led to a debate about who was responsible for the delay in fixing the compensation rates.

Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) fixed the Transferable Development Rights (TDR) rate at Rs 1 crore for the 15 acres and 17.5 guntas of land based on the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996, in June this year. The property had been acquired to widen the road. The royal family challenged the valuation method.

On 10 December, the Supreme Court questioned the government for the delay in compensation. Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the Revenue Department are now playing blame games over paying the valuation of the property.

Sources told Salar News that the districts' deputy commissioners are responsible for fixing the market value of any property for which compensation is to be paid, according to Section 26 of The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act 2013. In this case, it applies to the BBMP commissioner. However, BBMP said they had written letters to the Revenue Department's Principal Secretary for fixing the market value but received no response.

The apex court stated that the BBMP was supposed to fix the land's value—the guidance value—which was Rs 2,83,500 per sqm for the Bengaluru Palace land and Rs 2,04,400 per sqm for Jayamahal road, both of which worked out to Rs 3,000 crore.

State government acquired 15 acres on Jayamahal and Ballari Roads in Bengaluru to widen the road *PHOTO: X*

Guidance value is the minimum price at which a property must be registered for financial transactions. It varies by area and is set by the Revenue Department, considering stamp duty and registration fees. It's usually lower than the market value.

The guidance value applies to entire areas or roads, not individual properties. In contrast, the market value of a property is determined by the deputy commissioners under the Land Acquisition Act 2013.

According to sources, BBMP had fixed the value for the Bangalore Palace land. Still, the Revenue Department reportedly did not notify the guidance value under Section 45 (B) of the Karnataka Stamp Act, 1957. BBMP is said to have sent several reminders to the Department of Stamps and Registration to notify the guidance value.

However, sources in the Revenue Department maintained that under the Karnataka Stamp Act, 1957, it has no role in fixing the market value of a property.

"When the government acquires a property, the market rate is fixed by the deputy commissioner, and in the Bengaluru Palace land case, the BBMP commissioner had to notify the value," they added.

A Revenue Department official said the Central Valuation Committee (CVC) fixes the market value guidelines or guidance value once a year.

A preliminary notification is issued, and objections are called for. Once the final guidance value is notified, the role of the CVC ends.

The guidance value is a gazetted public document and is not issued case by case.

The gazette notification for 2019 was in the public domain. The CVC has fixed the guideline values for 2023, and that is also in the public domain. *—Salar News*

Newborn dies after abandonment in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 13 DEC

A heart-wrenching incident unfolded in Belagavi when a newborn baby was found abandoned shortly after delivery, ultimately leading to the infant's death on Friday morning. The mother, identified through hospital documentation as Bebijan Saddam Hussain Sayyed from Bailhongal, had been admitted for delivery on 8 December and gave birth to a baby girl that same day.

On Thursday morning, hospital staff discovered the mother had left the maternity ward, leaving her newborn behind on the bed. According to Dr Shetty, the child had been attended to by caretaking staff but sadly did not survive. He confirmed that the delivery had been normal.

APMC police filed a case against Bebijan. *—Salar News*

MEA: Indians in Syria safely evacuated

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

India has evacuated from Syria all its nationals who wished to return home after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar Assad's authoritarian government in the Arab nation. The Syrian government collapsed on Sunday as the rebels seized control of capital Damascus after capturing several other prominent cities and towns. India evacuated its nationals from Syria on Tuesday. "We have evacuated all Indian nationals in Syria who wished to return home following recent developments in that country. So far, 77 Indian nationals from Syria have been evacuated," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Friday. Our embassy personnel in Damascus accompanied them to the border, after which our mission in Lebanon received them and facilitated their immigration, he said. *—PTI*

Hurriyat chief claims house arrest, denied prayers

SRINAGAR, 13 DEC

Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Friday claimed that he was put under house arrest and prevented from offering congregational prayers at the Jama Masjid. This is the second consecutive Friday that the Mirwaiz was allegedly barred from offering the prayers at the Jama Masjid in the city's Nowhatta locality. There was no word from police on Farooq's allegation. "Again disallowed from going to Jama Masjid on a Friday for the second consecutive week. As I raise people's issues and concerns from the pulpit, as is my duty, it seems to make the authorities jittery and uncomfortable, so lock him up!" the Hurriyat chairman said in a post on X. He said "as if by locking me up" the issues would disappear and the reality altered. *—PTI*

Court junks plea for FIR against Cong's Kharge

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

In a relief to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, a Delhi court has refused to direct the police to register an FIR against him. Judicial magistrate Chatinder Singh, however, took cognisance of the complaint. The plea alleged that Kharge made a scathing remark against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an election rally in Karnataka on 27 April, 2023. The complainant claimed of having "complete details" of the accused persons and witnesses to be examined, and therefore, said neither any recovery, nor any material evidence was required to be collected by the police. *—PTI*

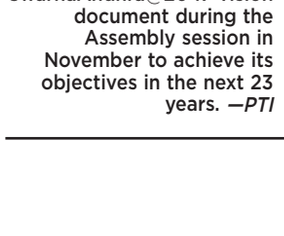


PHOTO: X

CM Naidu unveils 'Swarna Andhra 2047' vision

VIJAYAWADA, 13 DEC

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday unveiled the "Swarna Andhra-2047" vision document, aimed at achieving a 'wealthy, healthy and happy' Andhra Pradesh. The chief minister announced it during a public meeting at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium here, which encompasses 10 principles (padi sutralu) and one vision to accomplish a golden future for the southern state. Zero poverty, employment, skilling and human resources development, water security, farmer-agri tech and best global logistics were some of the 10 principles. Others include cost optimisation of energy and fuel, product perfection, swachh (clean) Andhra and incorporating deep tech in all walks of life. Naidu introduced the SwarnaAndhra@2047 vision document during the Assembly session in November to achieve its objectives in the next 23 years. *—PTI*

India seeks terror-free ties with Pak: EAM

'India concerned about B'desh minorities' safety'

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

India wants to have good relations with Pakistan that are free of terror but if it does not show it is changing its past behaviour, then there will be implications on bilateral ties, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

The minister also said that trade relations had been disrupted due to certain decisions taken by Pakistan in 2019.

"I would like to inform the honourable member that in terms of improving ties with Pakistan, like any other neighbour, we would like to have good relations with Pakistan. But, like any other neighbour, we would also like to have relations free of terrorists," he said during Question Hour.

This has been the position of the government of India, Jaishankar said.

"We have made it very clear that it is for the Pakistani side to show that they are changing their behaviour of the past and if they don't, of course, there are implications on relations. So the ball is very much in Pakistan's court in this regard," he said.

Trade ties with Pakistan were snapped after the Centre abrogated Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

He added that the treatment of minorities in Bangladesh is a matter of concern for India and New Delhi hopes that Dhaka will take action for their safety

Jaishankar also said that security forces would be going to all patrolling points in Depsang in Ladakh and also to the eastward limit which are historically been India's patrolling limit.

He said in Lok Sabha that the last of the disengagement agreement with China was related to Depsang and Demchok. *—PTI*

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar PHOTO: PTI

Mahua's remark on judge's death causes stir, Rijiju warns her

Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra's reference to the death of judge BH Loya "long before his time" created uproar in Lok Sabha on Friday as Union minister Kiren Rijiju accused her of raising a matter settled by the Supreme Court, and warned of "appropriate parliamentary action". *—PTI*

MINORITIES BEING REDUCED TO 'SECOND-GRADE' CITIZENS: AKHILESH

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav alleged Friday that efforts are underway to reduce the country's minorities, particularly Muslims, to "second-grade" citizens, and claimed their rights and properties are being systematically eroded.

Speaking in Lok Sabha during a debate on the 'Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India', Yadav charged the government with fostering inequality and failing to uphold the constitutional rights of marginalised communities.

Akhilesh Yadav PHOTO: PTI

"This Constitution is our armour, our security. It provides us strength whenever needed. For people like us and the weak in the country, especially for PDA (Pichdde, Dalit and Alpsankhyak), saving the Constitution is a matter of life and death," he said. *—PTI*

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar conducts proceedings as LoP Mallikarjun Kharge speaks in the House during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi, Friday. PHOTO: PTI

RS adjourned over VP's no-confidence

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Opposition move to seek impeachment of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar led to pandemonium in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, with opposition and treasury benches clashing and the Chairman too wading into the issue.

The proceedings of the House, which have been marred because of the issue and the Adani controversy, were adjourned in the first hour itself but not before Dhankhar, saying he was a farmer's son and he will not "show weakness".

"Day in and day out there is only a campaign against the Chairman.....it's a campaign not against me, it's a campaign against category to which I belong," he asserted.

"I am personally pained for a reason that the main opposition party has put is as a blitz as a campaign against the Chairman. They are entitled to bring motion against me. This is their constitutional right but they are deviating from the constitutional provisions...," he said.

"I appeal to you Khargeji, please spare time, accept my prayer, see me in my chamber today. Same request I am making to the Leader of the House also...I will try to navigate things so that we are able to work as member of the House. I would expect Kharge Ji to respond. Lets us meet in my chamber and find a way out," Dhankhar said.

Kharge retorted: "How can I respect you. You are insulting me". *—PTI*

Oppn files impeachment notice against Judge

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Members of several opposition parties on Friday moved a notice in the Rajya Sabha for the impeachment of Allahabad High Court Judge Shekhar Kumar Yadav over his alleged controversial remarks at a recent VHP event, sources said.

The notice for moving the impeachment motion was signed by 55 opposition MPs, including Kapil Sibal, Vivek Tankha, Digvijaya Singh, John Brittas, Manoj Kumar Jha and Saket Gokhale.

These MPs met the Rajya Sabha secretary general and handed over the notice for impeachment a few minutes before the start of the day's proceedings, the sources said.

Some of the other prominent MPs who have signed the notice are P Chidambaram, Randeep Surjewala, Pramod Tiwari, Jairam Ramesh, Mukul Wasnik, Naseer Hussain, Raghav Chadha, Fauzia Khan, Sanjay Singh, AA Rahim, V Sivadasan and Renuka Chowdhury.

The notice mentioned that the speech/lecture delivered by Justice Yadav during an event organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) prima facie showed that he "engaged in hate speech and incitement to communal disharmony in violation of the Constitution of India". *— PTI*

Shekhar Kumar Yadav PHOTO: PTI

IN WEST BENGAL

BJP plans Ram temple amid TMC's mosque proposal

PHOTO: PTI

KOLKATA, 13 DEC

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in West Bengal's Murshidabad district has revealed plans to construct a Ram temple in Berhampore, shortly after Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLA Humayun Kabir suggested establishing a mosque modelled after the Babri Masjid in Beldanga.

The BJP has outlined its intention to commence construction of the temple on 22 January 2025, coinciding with the one-year anniversary of the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Shakharav Sarkar, BJP's Berhampore organisational district president, stated that the land for the temple has already been secured, with the project estimated to cost Rs 10 crore. "We have identified land in the Berhampore area, and construction will begin soon," he informed reporters.

Kabir's proposal for the mosque has ignited political turmoil, with opposition parties accusing him of attempting to stir community divisions for electoral gain. The BJP's initiative to build a Ram temple is perceived as a strategic effort to bolster its appeal within the Hindu community in Murshidabad, a district where minorities comprise approximately 75 per cent of the population.

In response to the unfolding controversy, the TMC has distanced itself from Kabir's comments, clarifying that they represent his personal views. "The TMC has nothing to do with this statement from Kabir," asserted a senior party leader. Meanwhile, Congress has condemned Kabir's remarks, labelling them as divisive in a region known for its communal sensitivity. *—PTI*

Uddhav mocks BJP slogan, flags temple safety

Uddhav Thackeray PHOTO: PTI

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

Uddhav Thackeray, chief of Shiv Sena (UBT), has launched a scathing attack on the BJP-led central government over its commitment to Hindutva, particularly regarding the safety of Hindus in Bangladesh, where minorities have faced violent outbreaks.

At a press conference in Mumbai, Thackeray accused the BJP of using Hindutva solely for electoral gain, highlighting a recent notice from the Railways to demolish an 80-year-old Hanuman temple outside Dadar station. He questioned the BJP's "Ek hai toh safe hai" (united, we are safe) slogan, stating that even temples are not secure under their governance.

Thackeray urged Modi to inform Parliament about the measures being taken to protect Hindus in Bangladesh, especially following the violent protests that ousted former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Meanwhile, IAS officer Ashwini Bhide has been appointed as principal secretary to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. *—PTI*

NCP leaders told to 'break' Sharad's party, claims Raut

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Friday claimed the BJP has tasked Nationalist Congress Party leaders Praful Patel and Ajit Pawar with "breaking" the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP).

Talking to reporters in Mumbai, Raut said Sharad Pawar toils hard even at the age of 84, but efforts were being made to engineer a split in his party.

Anyone leaving the opposition party should be ashamed of his action, averred the Rajya Sabha MP.

"The NCP does not have a position in the Union Cabinet because the quota for (NDA allies) to become a minister at the Centre is six MPs. Praful Patel and Ajit Pawar have been told (by BJP) to break five MPs from the NCP (SP) so you can complete the quota of six MPs and then you will be given a berth in the Union cabinet," Raut claimed.

Sanjay Raut PHOTO: PTI

The Sharad Pawar-led party has eight MPs in the Lok Sabha, while the NCP headed by deputy CM Ajit Pawar has one member in the lower house of Parliament.

Earlier in the day, Ajit Pawar met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. *—PTI*

RS bypolls: BJP's Rekha & TMC's Ritabrata elected unopposed

CHANDIGARH,13 DEC

Former National Commission for Women chairperson and BJP leader Rekha Sharma was declared elected unopposed in the Rajya Sabha bypoll from Haryana after the deadline for withdrawal of nomination ended at 3 pm on Friday. Sharma had filed her nomination for the bypoll from Haryana here on Tuesday. She was the lone candidate in the fray. BJP had on Monday announced Sharma's name for 20 December Rajya Sabha bypolls.

Accompanied by Haryana Minister Mahipal Dhanda and former Haryana Assembly Speaker Gian Chand Gupta, Sharma was given certificate by the Returning Officer after being declared elected unopposed. Opposition had not fielded a candidate for the bypolls.

Meanwhile, Trinamool Congress candidate for the Rajya Sabha by-elections, Ritabrata Banerjee, was declared winner uncontested. Banerjee was handed the certificate as winner by a West Bengal Assembly secretariat official on Friday. *—PTI*

TAMIL OR TELUGU?

Stalin, Naidu clash over Gukesh's heritage

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The debate over the heritage of chess prodigy Gukesh Dommaraju has sparked a political battle between Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and Andhra Pradesh's former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. Gukesh, who hails from Chennai, has been at the centre of a controversy after Stalin and Naidu made conflicting claims about his linguistic and cultural roots.

MK Stalin, emphasised that Gukesh is a Tamilian, highlighting the state's contribution to his rise in the world of chess. Stalin expressed pride in the fact that Gukesh's success is a testament to Tamil Nadu's sporting and intellectual prowess.

On the other hand, Chandrababu Naidu, leader of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh, asserted that Gukesh's Telugu roots should be acknowledged. Naidu highlighted the chess champion's Telugu-speaking background, claiming him as a representative of the Telugu community.

This statement led to further tensions, as Naidu pushed for recognition of Gukesh as a symbol of the state's success. *—PTI*

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, World Champion D Gukesh and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu PHOTO: X

Maha Kumbh a 'mahayagya' of unity: PM

PRAYAGRAJ, 13 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday termed the Maha Kumbh 2025 a "mahayagya of unity" which would take the country's cultural and spiritual identity to new heights.

"The Maha Kumbh is a mahayagya of unity," Modi said. "It will take the country's cultural and spiritual identity to new heights."

The prime minister inaugurated 167 key development projects worth Rs 5,500 crore, aimed at improving the city's infrastructure for the 2025 Maha Kumbh mela.

The 2025 Maha Kumbh mela will be held from 13 January (Paush Poornima) to 26 February at Prayagraj. The Maha Kumbh is organised every 12 years. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers at the Saraswati Koop, in Prayagraj, Friday PHOTO: PTI

MP farmer, family protest on knees over land issue

DEWAS, 13 DEC

A farmer, his wife and three children walked on their knees at the sub-divisional magistrate office complex in Khategaon in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas district to highlight their distress due to an alleged land dispute. Farmer Lakshman told reporters a neighbour had blocked the way to his 1.5-acre farm in Davtha village, some 100 kilometres from the district headquarters, which was preventing him from harvesting his maize crop. Lakshman claimed he, his wife and three children carried out this kind of protest on Wednesday since representations to authorities had been in vain. A video of the family's act went viral on social media on Thursday. *—PTI*

Kerala HC grants bail in 2010 hand chopping case

KOCHI, 13 DEC

Kerala High Court has granted bail to the main conspirator in the sensational college professor hand chopping case of 2010 who was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by a special NIA court last year. A bench of Justices Raja Vijayaraghavan and PV Balakrishnan suspended the sentence of convict MK Nasar while his appeal against the NIA court's decision is pending in the High Court. The NIA court had found Nasar to be the main conspirator in the case. The High Court said that in view of these facts and circumstances, it was of the opinion that the sentence imposed on the applicant (Nasar) can be suspended pending the consideration of his appeal. He was among the six persons convicted in the second phase of the trial in the hand chopping case. *—PTI*

Severed human head found in garbage dump

KOLKATA, 13 DEC

A severed human head, suspected of that of a woman aged between 35 and 40, was recovered from a garbage dump in Kolkata's Tollygunge area on Friday morning, police said. Local people spotted a plastic bag containing the body part in a vat on Graham Road under Golf Green police station area early this morning, they said. Senior police officers of the South Suburban Division, along with personnel from local police stations, rushed to the spot and started an investigation. The severed head has been sent to MR Bangur Hospital for further examination, an officer said. Relevant samples from the recovery spot have also been collected by personnel of the scientific wing of the city police. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Tripura targets 7,000 hectares for palm oil by FY27

AGARTALA, 13 DEC

The Tripura government has planned to bring around 7,000 hectares of wasteland under oil palm cultivation by the 2026-27 financial year (FY'27), an official said on Friday. Initially, the Centre had identified 7,000 hectares for oil palm cultivation in the state but the ICAR-Indian Institute of Oil Palm Research reassessment committee classified 1.46 lakh hectares as a potential area for such farming in 2020 through digital mapping. He said the department has selected two processors as technical associated partners- Godrej Agrovet Pvt Ltd and Patanjali Foods Pvt Ltd -for implementation of the national mission and allotted areas to these companies. Jamatia said Godrej Agrovet has already set up an oil palm nursery at Nalkata in Dhalai district where 1.55 lakh of both exotic and indigenous type seedlings will be produced. *—PTI*

30 Delhi schools receive bomb threat

This is 2nd such incident in one week

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Around 30 schools in Delhi received bomb threats over e-mail in the early hours of Friday, triggering a multi-agency search of their premises, officials said.

Nothing suspicious was found in any of the schools after the searches, they added.

The latest threats come close on the heels of at least 44 schools receiving similar e-mails on 9 December. Police had declared those threats as hoaxes.

Reacting to the development, former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal pointed out that it was the second such instance within a week and wondered how these bomb threats would affect the children.

The fire department, police and bomb-detection teams, along with dog squads, rushed to the schools and conducted thorough checking, the official said.

The latest threats come close on the heels of at least 44 schools receiving similar e-mails on 9 December PHOTO: PTI

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Ravi Singh told PTI Videos that they conducted checking followed by security protocol but nothing suspicious was found and it is suspected to be a hoax.

According to the source, the content of the e-mail reads: "This e-mail is to inform you that there are many explosives in your school premises and I am sure that you all do not check your students' bags frequently when they enter the school premises.

The e-mail further said that the explosions could take place on Friday and Saturday. "Reply back to this e-mail for our demands, otherwise the bombs will be detonated," it added. *—PTI*

FLOOD WARNING

Tamil Nadu continues to reel under rain, inundation

CHENNAI, 13 DEC

Rain continued to batter several districts across Tamil Nadu on Friday and the Thamirabarani river was in spate due to continuous downpours in the southern districts.

The Thoothukudi district administration has issued a flood warning in the Srivaikuntam and Eral areas owing to the heavy inflows into the Thamirabarani river. People in low lying areas have been advised to shift to safe places.

In Chennai, the Public Works Department (PWD) has issued the first flood warning for the areas near the Redhills and Chembarambakkam reservoirs, among the chief sources of drinking water for the city, following the dangerous increase in water levels due to incessant rain in the catchment areas.

Due to a heavy downpour upstream of Thamirabarani, a flood warning was issued to all villages and towns situated on the banks of the river, the administration said.

Police and Fire and rescue services personnel have asked people to shift to safer areas in Tamil Nadu PHOTO: PTI

The revenue officials have been instructed to evacuate the people from all vulnerable places in Srivaikundam and Eral.

Police and Fire and rescue services personnel have asked people to shift to safer areas.

Heavy rains batter Kerala: Rains continued to lash parts of Kerala on Friday, and the India Meteorological Department issued an 'orange alert' for three southern districts. Orange alert was issued for Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Pathanamthitta districts. *—PTI*

SC: April verdict bench to hear EVM plea

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Supreme Court on Friday said the plea seeking a policy for verification of electronic voting machines should go before the same bench that delivered a verdict in April rejecting the demand for bringing back the old paper ballots.

When the plea on EVMs came up for hearing, a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and P B Varale told petitioner's counsel senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, "Why don't this matter go before the same bench?"

Sankaranarayanan informed the court about its April judgment on a batch of pleas over EVMs.

In its verdict on 26 April, the apex court termed the suspicion of manipulation of the EVMs "unfounded" and said the polling devices were "secured" and eliminated booth capturing and bogus voting.

PHOTO: ANI

The top court, however, opened a window for the aggrieved unsuccessful candidates securing second and third places in poll results while allowing them to seek verification of microcontroller chips embedded in five per cent EVMs per assembly constituency on a written request upon payment of a fee to the poll panel.

According to the petition, the current standard operating procedure issued by the EC only involves basic diagnostic tests and mock polls without scrutinising the burnt memory for tampering. *—PTI*

SC rejects Cong's plea on Goa MLAs' defection

Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea challenging a decision of the Goa assembly speaker rejecting a disqualification petition of the Congress against eight of its MLAs who defected to the ruling BJP in 2022. Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar asked Congress leader and petitioner Girish Chodankar to challenge decision. *—PTI*

SC grants future bail to ex-WB minister Partha

Supreme Court granted conditional future bail to former West Bengal minister Partha Chatterjee in a money laundering case related to the cash-for-job scam. The top court said Chatterjee shall not hold any public office but can continue as MLA. *—PTI*

SC denies urgent hearing on TM Krishna's award plea

Supreme Court on Friday refused to grant an urgent hearing on a plea challenging a Madras High Court order allowing the conferment of an award named after legendary vocalist MS Subbulakshmi on well-known Carnatic music singer TM Krishna. Additional solicitor general N Venkataraman mentioned the matter before a bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar and sought an urgent hearing as the award is scheduled to be conferred upon Krishna on 15 December. *—PTI*

Life is precious: SC orders aid for ailing farmer

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Supreme Court on Friday expressed concern over the deteriorating health of Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on a fast-unto-death protest at the Khanauri border for over 17 days.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the Centre and Punjab government representatives to immediately meet Dallewal and provide him medical help and persuade him to break his fast-unto-death protest saying his life was precious.

The bench asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Punjab and advocate general Gurminder Singh to ensure that no force was used against Dallewal to break his fast-unto-death protest, unless it was imperative to save his life.

"You both look into this issue immediately and ensure that it is resolved," the bench told Mehta and Singh, while advising that Dallewal could be shifted to PGI Chandigarh or nearby Patiala city for urgent medical intervention, if need arises.

Dallewal has been on a fast-unto-death at the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana since 26 November to press Centre into accepting agitating' demands, a legal guarantee of MSP. *—PTI*

The Indian Defence Ministry approved the procurement of six conventional submarines, which will feature significant local content PHOTO: X

German firm eyes $5B submarine deal in India

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

German defence giant ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) is pursuing a €5 billion contract to supply six diesel-electric stealth submarines to the Indian Navy, aiming to establish India as a global hub for submarine and warship construction amid rising naval demands.

In an exclusive interview, TKMS CEO Oliver Burkhard highlighted the potential for a long-term partnership with India, citing bipartisan support in Germany for enhancing bilateral defence ties. Burkhard noted that increasing geopolitical tensions are driving demand for naval platforms, positioning India favourably for expanded production capabilities.

The collaboration of TKMS with the state-run Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) is part of its bid for the submarine deal, estimated at Rs 44,000 crore. They are competing against a partnership between Spanish firm Navantia and Larsen & Toubro Ltd. The Indian Defence Ministry is set to finalise the winning project under Project 75 India (P75-I).

Burkhard expressed confidence that constructing submarines in India would be economically attractive compared to European counterparts, bolstering the country's position as a supplier for international markets.

The Indian Defence Ministry approved the procurement of six conventional submarines, which will feature significant local content and be developed under a strategic partnership model to foster domestic manufacturing. *—PTI*

Kerala director, key witness in 2017 assault case dies

KOCHI, 13 DEC

Malayalam film director P Balachandrakumar, a pivotal witness in the high-profile 2017 actress assault case in Kerala, passed away at 5.40am early on Friday. He was receiving treatment for a kidney ailment at the Dr KM Cherian Institute of Medical Science Hospital in Chengannur.

His body will be transported to Thiruvananthapuram later.

Balachandrakumar directed the 2013 film 'Cowboy' and gained notoriety in 2021 for his allegations against actor Dileep, a key accused in the controversial assault case.

He claimed that Dileep possessed footage of the assault and attempted to influence witnesses, and named Pulsar Suni, the prime suspect, as a visitor to Dileep's home. *—PTI*

Kurla accident: BEST drivers found buying alcohol

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

Alarming videos featuring drivers of the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking appear to show individuals consuming alcohol while operating wet-leased buses, sparking outrage on social media. The videos have surfaced following a tragic accident on 9 December, where a wet-leased electric bus in Kurla West collided with vehicles and pedestrians, resulting in seven fatalities and 42 injuries.

PHOTO: X

A senior BEST official disclosed that four videos have emerged this week. In one disturbing clip, a driver is filmed drinking alcohol while seated at the wheel, confronted by a security officer; this incident reportedly took place at the Mulund depot on election day. The driver has since been dismissed. Additional footage shows drivers stopping their buses to purchase alcohol in Bandra East and Andheri, further raising concerns about public safety.

Suhas Samant, president of BEST Kamgar Sena, condemned the videos, claiming they tarnish the institution's reputation. He highlighted that regular BEST employees adhere strictly to service regulations and would not engage in such reckless behaviour.

In response to these incidents, Anil Kumar Diggikar, the general manager, announced that a meeting with wet-lease bus operators resulted in a decision to implement mandatory breathalyser tests among other measures. *—PTI*

IN JHARKHAND

Birhor tribe fights against child marriage

RANCHI, 13 DEC

In a significant development, members of the Birhor tribe, recognised as a particularly vulnerable tribal group in Jharkhand, have for the first time joined a movement against child marriage in Giridih district. The initiative has been spearheaded by the children's rights organisation, Just Rights for Children Alliance (JRC).

The Birhor, a semi-nomadic community heavily reliant on forest resources, face considerable socio-economic challenges. JRC reported that in an unprecedented gathering, hundreds from the Birhor community assembled to oppose the prevalent practice of child marriage. Illuminated by candlelight, participants included youth, women, children, and elders, who collectively pledged to combat this social issue.

The Birhor, a semi-nomadic community heavily reliant on forest resources, face considerable socio-economic challenges PHOTO: ANI

This campaign marks a vital step in educating the community about the implications and legalities surrounding child marriage. Participants engaged in discussions highlighting the adverse effects this practice has on children's health, education, and overall well-being.

The movement is also supported by Banvasi Vikas Ashram, one of 250 partner NGOs within the JRC alliance, which has been conducting candlelight marches as part of the 'Bal Vivah Mukt Bharat' campaign launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. *—PTI*

Man gives 'triple talaq' to wife for going alone for walk

THANE, 13 DEC

Police in Maharashtra's Thane district have booked a 31-year-old man for allegedly giving 'triple talaq' (instant divorce), which was banned in 2019, to his wife, an official said on Friday.

The accused, a resident of the Mumbra area, called the father of his 25-year-old wife on Tuesday and said he was annulling his marriage through 'triple talaq', now a criminal offence, as she was going alone for a walk, the official said.

On a complaint by his wife, police on Wednesday registered an FIR against the man under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita section 351(4) for criminal intimidation and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act. *—PTI*

2 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

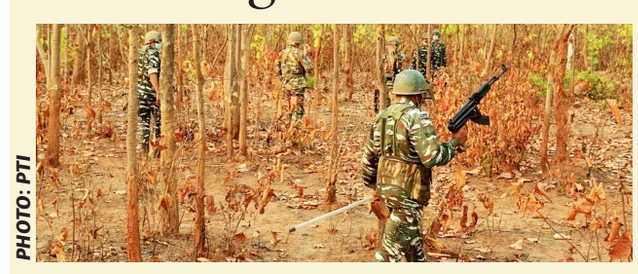


PHOTO: PTI

BIJAPUR, 13 DEC

Two Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Friday, a senior police official said. The gunfight took place in the morning in the forest of Nendra and Punnur villages when a team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar Yadav told PTI. After the exchange of fire stopped, bodies of two Naxalites, one 12 bore rifle and other Maoist-related materials were recovered from the spot, he said. With this incident, bodies of 217 Naxalites have been recovered so far this year following separate encounters in Chhattisgarh's Bastar division. *—PTI*

PRAYERS AFTER ASSAD'S FALL

Syrians pray in Damascus for the first Friday prayers since the fall of President Bashar al-Assad's rule a week ago. The leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the rebel group that captured the capital, joined the prayers and urged people to celebrate peacefully. Thousands took to the streets following prayers to celebrate the end of Al-Assad's rule
PHOTO: PTI

Bitcoin mining plagues Iran with blackouts

Iran's capital and outlying provinces have faced rolling power blackouts for weeks in October and November, with electricity cuts disrupting people's lives and businesses. And while several factors are likely involved, some suspect cryptocurrency mining has played a role in the outages.

Iran economy has been hobbled for years by international sanctions over its advancing nuclear programme. The country's fuel reserves have plummeted, with the government selling off more to cover budget shortfalls as wars rage in the Middle East and Tehran grapples with mismanagement.

The demand on the grid has not let up, however — even as Iranians stopped using air conditioners as the weather cooled in the fall and before winter months set in, when people fire up their gas heaters.

Meanwhile, bitcoin's value has rocketed to all-time highs after the US election was clinched by Donald Trump. It hit the $1,00,000 mark for the first time last week, just hours after the president-elect said he intends to nominate cryptocurrency advocate Paul Atkins to be the next chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The surge has led some to suspect that organised cryptocurrency mining — sucking away huge amounts of power — has played a part in the outages in Iran.

"Unfortunately, some opportunistic and exploitative individuals use subsidised electricity, public networks and other resources for cryptocurrency mining without authorization," Mostafa Rajabi, the CEO of Iran's government-owned power company, said back in August.

Iran's state energy company did not respond to a request for comment.

Power outages have come and gone in the past in Iran, which struggles with aging equipment at many of its plants. Over the summer, sustained blackouts struck industrial parks near Tehran and other cities. Then in October and November, rolling power cuts across Tehran's neighbourhoods became the norm in daylight hours.

Power outages have come and gone in the past in Iran, which struggles with aging equipment at many of its plants ***PHOTO: PTI***

Climate change has been blamed in part, with persisting droughts and less water running through Iranian hydroelectric dams.

Iran's reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian ordered several power plants to stop burning mazut, a high-polluting heavy fuel common in the former Soviet Union countries. Tehran has used it in the past to make up the difference in electricity generation.

Fuel reserves, both in diesel and natural gas, also remain low even though Iran is an OPEC member and home to one of the world's second-largest reserves of natural gas, behind only Russia. There's been no explanation for the decision to keep those reserves low, though critics have suggested Iran likely sold the fuel to cover budget shortfalls.

For his part, Pezeshkian has said that he must "honestly tell the public about the energy situation."

"We have no choice but to consume energy economically, especially gas, in the current conditions and the cold weather," he said in mid-November. "I myself use warm clothes at home; others can do the same."

Still, winter heating isn't in full swing quite yet on Tehran — raising questions where the power is going.

In many poor and densely populated neighbourhoods across the country, people have access to free, unmetered electricity. Mosques, schools, hospitals and other sites also receive free power.

And with electricity in general sold at subsidized rates, bitcoin processing centres have boomed. They require immense amounts of electricity to power specialized computers and to keep them cool.

Determining how much power is used up by mining is difficult, particularly as miners now use virtual private networks that mask their location, said Masih Alavi, the CEO of an Iranian-government-licensed mining company called Viraminer.

Also, miners have been renting apartments to hide their rigs inside of empty homes. "They distribute their machines across several apartments to avoid being detected," Alavi said.

In 2021, one estimate suggested Iran processed as much as $1 billion in bitcoin transactions. That value likely has spiked, given bitcoin's rise. Meanwhile, Iran's blackouts began in earnest as bitcoin spiked from around $67,000 to over $1,00,000 in its historic rally.

Rajabi, the state electricity company CEO, said his firm would offer rewards of $725 for people to report unlicensed bitcoin farms.

The farms have caused "an abnormal increase in consumption, disruptions, and problems in power networks," Rajabi said.

The amount of power used by some 230,000 unlicensed devices is equivalent, he said, to the entire power needs of Iran's Markazi province — one of the country's chief manufacturing sites.

Iranian officials and media have not linked bitcoin's surge and the ongoing blackouts but the public has, with social media users resharing a video showing a massive bitcoin farm earlier this year uncovered in Iran. A voice off camera asks how it was possible the electrical company did not discover the farm sooner.

The US Treasury and Israel have targeted bitcoin wallets that they've alleged are affiliated with operations run by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard to finance allied militant groups in Mideast war zones.

That suggests the Guard itself — one of the most-powerful forces within Iran — may be involved in the mining.

In contrast, Iranian media nearly every day report on individual mining operations being raided by police.

Iran may see bitcoin as a hedge against increased pressure from the incoming Trump administration and as regional allies are engulfed in turmoil, said Richard Nephew, an adjunct fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

'The Bibi Files' reveals Israel PM's corruption, tyranny

Veteran documentarian Alex Gibney, who in a decades-long career has tackled many a thorny issue, wasn't planning a film about Israel — until one day last year, when a stunning leak fell into his hands.

The leak turned out to be more like a deluge.

Suddenly, Gibney, through a source who contacted him on the Signal messaging app, was being offered access to copious video recordings of police interviews with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his wife Sara, his son Yair, and a host of associates and benefactors, all conducted as part of the sprawling corruption case against Netanyahu. It amounted to an astonishing 1,000-plus hours of tapes.

The Oscar-winning filmmaker didn't speak Hebrew, but sensed this was something big. He turned to longtime Israeli investigative reporter Raviv Drucker, who did a deep dive into the material, Gibney says, and showed him that "we had something that was very explosive." Then Gibney enlisted colleague Alexis Bloom, who had worked in Israel, to direct.

The result: 'The Bibi Files', a hard-hitting documentary that certainly has timing on its side — this week, as it was released on streaming, Netanyahu took the stand in the long-running case.

If the timing is fortuitous, the film faced other obstacles. For one thing, Gibney and Bloom had to raise funds without disclosing to potential backers what they had, given the secrecy involved. Many potential backers and distributors were also nervous about getting involved.

Then there was the biggest obstacle of all: The film cannot legally be shown in Israel, due to privacy laws regulating such proceedings.

That doesn't mean Israelis aren't seeing it, though. Many have managed to watch the film either by using a VPN to bypass streaming restrictions, or by watching leaked versions that made their way to social media. "The film is being pirated like wildfire in Israel," says Bloom.

And it has made a predictable splash, just as Netanyahu becomes the first sitting Israeli leader to take the stand as a criminal defendant. On Tuesday, he promised defiantly to knock down the "absurd" corruption allegations against him.

The longest-serving prime minister in Israel's history is charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. He is accused of accepting tens of thousands of dollars worth of cigars and champagne from a billionaire Hollywood producer in exchange for assistance with personal and business interests, and of promoting advantageous regulations for media moguls in exchange for favorable coverage.

The film cannot legally be shown in Israel, due to privacy laws regulating such proceedings ***PHOTO: IMDB***

In the leaked police videos, the 75-year-old leader sits at his desk in a surprisingly cramped office, a map of the region behind him. He expresses outrage at the proceedings, calls witnesses liars, and notes he has much weightier matters to attend to. At one point, asked about numbers of champagne bottles, he says he spends his time counting missiles threatening Israel, not bottles. Frequently, his answer is he doesn't remember.

"We have a number of people on the record telling us what a great memory he has," says Gibney. "And almost every question that could be possibly incriminating, he says I can't recall.'"

Reviews in Israeli media for 'The Bibi Files' have mostly been positive, while noting that Netanyahu is portrayed in a harsh light. Not surprisingly, public reaction reflects longstanding divisions over the polarizing leader. He and his supporters say he's the subject of a witch hunt orchestrated by a hostile media and biased justice system out to topple his rule.

"Netanyahu's opponents will swear by the film and will only become more convinced that he is corrupt, dizzy with power and leading us to destruction," Nir Wolf, TV critic for the Netanyahu-friendly Israel Hayom paper, wrote. "His supporters will want to embrace him more."

Netanyahu has also noticed the film. In September, his lawyer asked the country's attorney general to investigate Drucker, who is a co-producer with Gibney, accusing him of trying to influence the legal proceedings.

No investigation has been launched. (In the film, Drucker notes that Netanyahu has previously sued him three times.)

The film, which interspersed police footage with commentary from former officials, Netanyahu associates, journalists and other analysts — including, frequently, Drucker — begins with the prime minister sitting for his first interview.

"With Netanyahu, nothing concentrates his mind more than the sound of the prison gate slammed behind his back," comments Nimrod Novik, a former adviser to late Prime Minister Shimon Peres. One of Gibney and Bloom's key arguments will be that Netanyahu's fear of potential prison time has influenced his policy decisions — from judicial reform to war.

Netanyahu appears indignant throughout. "You're asking me delusional questions," he tells his questioners. "This is preposterous and insane."

In other footage, Arnon Milchan, the billionaire Hollywood mogul, Netanyahu friend and, more recently, prosecution witness, describes delivering fancy pink champagne on demand for Sara Netanyahu, sometimes toting a cooler himself, as part of an alleged gifts-for-favors scheme. Elsewhere, Sara Netanyahu sits for questioning herself. "How are you not ashamed of yourselves?" she sharply admonishes the interviewers. She tells them that outside Israel, her husband is justly received as a king.

Footage also includes interviews with Israeli-American billionaires Sheldon and Miriam Adelson. Sheldon Adelson expresses discomfort with the friendship — "I don't think I'll continue the relationship with them" — and dismay over the cost of Netanyahu's preferred Cuban cigars: $1,100 for a box of 10.

And a combative Yair Netanyahu, the couple's 33-year-old son, tells his questioners: "You're investigating me because the Israeli police has become the Stasi secret police, wanting to overthrow the government." *—PTI*

Raj Kapoor: The man who mirrored India's hopes, despair via movies

CENTENARY CELEBRATION

He was born Ranbir Raj Kapoor on 14 December, 1924 in Peshawar and established roots many hundreds of miles away in Mumbai when he bought land in Chembur to set up RK Studios ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

"When I die, bring my body to my studio. It is quite possible that I may wake up amid their lights shouting, Action... Action," Raj Kapoor is quoted as saying in a book by his daughter. His words capturing as if in a frame freeze the passion of a filmmaker who left an abiding imprint on Indian cinema.

Raj Kapoor would have been 100 on 14 December. He released his first film in 1948, the year after Independence. And as India evolved through the decades, so did his movies, mirroring the dreams and conflicts of society in shades of black and white that gave way to glossy technicolour.

The man, the filmmaker, the far-seeing entrepreneur who started RK Studios with his first film itself and the patriarch of filmdom's 'first family', the lines blur and rearrange into the portrait of the larger than life persona still known as the original showman of Indian cinema.

Through the sepia tints of nostalgia emerges a sharp visionary who knew what would tick.

He was the impassioned lover of 'Barsaat', the impoverished wannabe of 'Shree 420', the down on his luck Chaplinesque tramp of 'Awara', the sensitive joker of 'Mera Naam Joker' and the possessive husband of 'Sangam'. Add to these titles such as 'Bobby', 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram' and 'Ram Teri Ganga Maili' he produced and directed but did not act in, and you have the consummate film man with an unerring eye on the box office.

Raj Kapoor ruled the silver screen along with the two other greats Dev Anand and fellow Peshawari Dilip Kumar. Unlike his colleagues, however, he was not just the actor but also producer and director who made films, spectacles and otherwise, with music that strikes a chord many decades later.

He only directed 10 movies, some such as 'Awara' and 'Shree 420' in the gallery of unforgettable classics, others like 'Bobby' and 'Bobby'blockbusters and then those debatable hits, including 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram', 'Prem Rog' and 'Ram Teri Ganga Maili'.

His filmography includes 'Andaz', 'Jaagte Raho' and 'Teesri Kasam' where Raj Kapoor the actor shone bright. He also produced films through his RK Studios, amongst the most powerful in the industry for many decades.

In all this, there was one flop - the introspective, ambitious 'Mera Naam Joker', now considered a classic. The failure broke him and he went on to do the teen romance 'Bobby'.

And all the films had great songs. Remember the global hit 'Awara Hoon', 'Jeena Yahan Marna Yahan', 'Pyar Hua Iqrar Hua' or 'Hum Tum Kamre Mein Band Ho'.

"He was an amazing musician... I suppose it was inborn. He probably got it from my mum who was a singer, not my father... He could play any instrument, whether it was the accordion, tabla, piano, flute or a 'duff'," brother Shashi Kapoor recalled in a documentary.

Raj Kapoor was the eldest of the three brothers - also including the unforgettable Shammi Kapoor. Each carved his own separate space in the industry, away from the shadow of their illustrious father Prithviraj Kapoor. Raj Kapoor was only 17 when he asked his father for permission to abandon his studies for a career in the movies. Prithviraj agreed on the condition that he would work as one of the many assistants employed by him on a monthly stipend of Rs 10. After a couple of movies as an actor, including the 1947's 'Neel Kamal' with Madhubala, Raj Kapoor decided to take the plunge as director and producer with 'Aag'. He was 24, and one of the world's youngest filmmakers at the time. 'Aag' was also a rumination on inner versus outer beauty, love and loyalty, themes that deeply resonated with the filmmaker who tackled it again in "Barsaat" (1949) and "Satyam Shivam Sundaram" (1978). Raj Kapoor turned to Charlie Chaplin's tramp persona in many of his early films starting from 1951's "Awara" and continuing in 'Shree 420' and 'Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai', which was directed by his trusted aide Radhu Karmakar.

He was a creature of habit. Through his 37- year career as a filmmaker - beginning with 'Aag' in 1948 and ending with 'Ram Teri...' in 1985 - he stuck mostly to the same talented team. It included writer KA Abbas, cinematographer Karmakar, musicians Shankar-Jaikishen, lyricist Shailendra and singer Mukesh, who he called his soul and came to be known as his voice. According to brother Shashi, their father and his theatrical productions influenced the socialist overtones in his elder brother's earlier films. Raj Kapoor once spoke of why 'Awara' became such a sensation. "The script came to me exactly at that time when India was evolving a new social concept, an acceptance for millions of its people and not just a handful of the haves with the rest of the have nots on the one side," he said in a documentary by Simi Garewal, who worked with him in "Mera Naam Joker". His heroines, mostly draped in white, played a central role in his movies. There was Vyajanthimala, Padmini and the most important collaboration was with Nargis.

A scene in 'Barsaat', which was released in 1949 after 'Andaz', inspired the famous RK Studio logo -- Raj Kapoor with a violin in one arm and Nargis hanging on his other.

'Awara' was judged the 'Top-Ten Greatest Performances of All Time in World Cinema' by Time magazine in 2005. It was also the film that established Raj Kapoor's enduring stardom beyond Indian shores, particularly in Russia.

He was born Ranbir Raj Kapoor on 14 December, 1924 in Peshawar, not far from where Dilip Kumar was born, and established roots many hundreds of miles away in Mumbai when he bought land in Chembur. That was where RK Studios was set up. It gave wing to his dreams. Here was a filmmaker unencumbered by logistics, whether it was designing a massive set to shoot a dream sequence in 'Awara', bringing tulips and expensive champagne to shoot key scenes in "Bobby" or the circus ring of 'Mera Naam Joker', his most autobiographical film and the last time he played the leading man. The year 1964 marked a shift for his cinema. 'Sangam' was the first big Hindi film to be shot in technicolour and abroad. It is also the film where his showman flourishes are more obvious with the idealism and intense romanticism of his earlier works giving way to more populist overtones. *—PTI*

Biden grants clemency to 4 Indian-Americans

WASHINGTON, 13 DEC

Four Indian-Americans facing sentences ranging from 17 years to life imprisonment are among nearly 1,500 people granted clemency by President Joe Biden. They are Meera Sachdeva, Babubhai Patel, Krishna Mote and Vikram Dutta. "America was built on the promise of possibility and second chances. As President, I have the great privilege of extending mercy to people who have demonstrated remorse and rehabilitation, restoring opportunity for Americans to participate in daily life and contribute to their communities, Biden said. *—PTI*

Teen stabs Thai-Aus schoolmate to death in fight

BANGKOK, 13 DEC

A 14-year-old has been arrested on charges alleging that he stabbed a Thai-Australian schoolmate to death in a fight after having an ongoing feud, police in Thailand said Friday. The suspect told investigators he and the victim harboured a mutual dislike from school and they agreed via the Line messaging app to meet outside a grocery store near their homes on Tuesday in Sattahip in Chonburi province, said police Col. Tanapol Klinkesorn. The suspect appeared to have lost the fight because the other boy was bigger, but the suspect rushed to his car to grab a cooking knife and stabbed the victim. Police charged him with causing fatal physical harm to another person and a weapons offense. He was release on USD 295 bail by the Chonburi Juvenile and Family Court. *—PTI*

'All We Imagine As Light' bags Critics Choice nomination

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Filmmaker Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light" has bagged a nomination in the Best Foreign Language Film category at the 30th annual Critics Choice Awards. The nominations for the awards ceremony, to be held on 12 January, 2025, were announced on Thursday evening by the Critics Choice Association (CCA).In the best foreign language film category, "All We Imagine As Light" is pitted against France's "Emilia Pérez", Latvia's "Flow", Ireland's "Kneecap", Brazil's "I'm Still Here" and Germany's "The Seed of the Sacred Fig", which is directed by dissident Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof. The nod at the Critics Choice Awards for "All We Imagine as Light" comes days after the film picked up two nominations at the 82nd Golden Globe Awards. *—PTI*

Belarus arrests 7 independent newspaper scribes

TALLINN, 13 DEC

Belarusian authorities have arrested seven journalists who worked for an independent regional news outlet, a media watchdog said Thursday, the latest move in a sweeping crackdown on dissent and freedom of speech by the country's authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko. The Belarusian Association of Journalists said the seven — journalists who worked for Intex-Press online newspaper in the western city of Baranavichy, including its founder Uladzimir Yanukevich — were arrested earlier this month and charged with "supporting extremist activities". Such accusations widely used by the authorities to silence independent voices. Belarus' law enforcement agencies have launched a new wave of arrests in recent months seeking to uproot any sign of dissent ahead of January's poll in which Lukashenko is seeking a seventh term. *—PTI*

Trump mulls strikes on Iran's nuclear sites

Trump reportedly told Israel PM he wants to avoid an Iranian breakout during his term

PHOTO: X

WASHINGTON DC, 13 DEC

US President-elect Donald Trump is weighing options to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon, including preventative airstrikes, The Wall Street Journal reported Friday.

The report came as Israel reportedly draws up plans for a potential attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, amid growing concern that the Islamic Republic, poised to build a bomb, could rush to finally do so; Iran and its proxies are weakened right now.

Trump has told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in recent calls that he wants to avoid an Iranian breakout during his term in office, the report said — though he seeks a means of stopping the Islamic Republic from going nuclear that does not trigger a new war, especially one in which US troops would become involved, according to the report, which cited transition officials.

The incoming administration is currently working on a "maximum pressure 2.0" plan, the report said, recreating the policy of aggressive sanctions on Iran that Trump pursued during his first term, having pulled out of the Obama-era agreement with the country meant to limit its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

In an interview with Time Magazine published Thursday, Trump said of a potential war with Iran, "Anything can happen. It's a very volatile situation." Trump considered preventative strikes on Iran's nuclear sites during the latter part of his first term but decided against it. This time, according to the WSJ report, his administration may be open to supporting an Israeli strike against the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities. Among the reasons Trump may be more open to military action this time cited in the report were Iran's alleged efforts to kill the president-elect. Israeli military officials said that they believe there is now an opportunity to strike Iran's nuclear sites, and are continuing preparations for a potential attack. *—Times of Israel*

In a first, US releases strategy to combat Islamophobia

WASHINGTON, 13 DEC

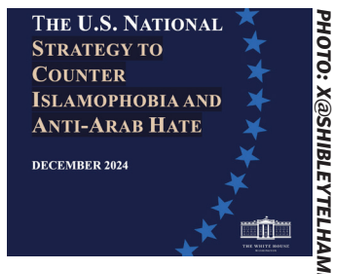


PHOTO: X@SHIBLEYTELHAMI

The White House has announced what it called the first-ever national strategy to counter Islamophobia, detailing more than 100 steps federal officials can take to curb hate, violence, bias and discrimination against Muslims and Arab Americans.

The proposal follows a similar national plan to battle anti-Semitism that President Joe Biden unveiled in May 2023, as fears about increasing hatred and discrimination were rising among US Jews.

Officials worked on the anti-Islamophobia plan for months. Its release came on Thursday – five weeks before Biden leaves office – means its implementation will mostly fall to President-elect Donald Trump, if his administration chooses to do so.

Announcing the strategy, the Biden administration said, "Over the past year, this initiative has become even more important as threats against American Muslim and Arab communities have spiked."

The plan details actions the Executive Branch can take, along with more than 100 other calls to action across all sectors of society.

The strategy has four basic priorities: increasing awareness of hatred against Muslims and Arabs while more widely recognising these communities' heritages; broadly improving their safety and security; appropriately accommodating Muslim and Arab religious practices by working to curb discrimination against them and encouraging cross-community solidarity to counter hate. *—PTI*

Biden wants US to keep supporting ties with India

WASHINGTON, 13 DEC

The Biden Administration expects bipartisan support for the India–US relationship to continue during the next Trump Administration, the White House has said.

"...(There has) been strong bipartisan support for growing this bilateral relationship. I would expect that, that will continue," said White House National Sâecurity Communications Advisor John Kirby on Thursday, adding that the outgoing president is very proud of how America's bilateral relationship with India has transformed during his administration. Biden is also closely monitoring the situation in Bangladesh and the US will hold the country's interim government accountable for ensuring the protection of religious and ethnic minorities, Kirby said. "We have been working closely with the interim government to enhance the capability of their law enforcement and security services to deal with the challenge. ...the leaders of the interim government have repeatedly committed to providing security to all Bangladeshis," he said. *—PTI*

Amazon, Meta to pay $1M each for Trump's inauguration

Amazon is planning to donate USD 1M to President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration fund, a move that comes as major tech companies seek to improve their relationship with the incoming president. Amazon on Thursday said it will also stream Trump's inauguration on its Prime Video service, a separate in-kind donation worth another USD 1M. Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, also said it donated USD 1M to Trump's inauguration fund. *—PTI*

Amid Chinese threat, US gives $300M to Taiwan

BEIJING, 13 DEC

PHOTO: X@INTMONITOR

The US House of Representatives has approved a USD 895B National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA), which includes provisions to enhance Taiwan's defence capabilities with up to USD 300 million in military articles and training, Taipei Times reported.

The bill was passed in a 281–140 vote on Wednesday.

US Representative Jack Bergman, chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special Operations, called the bill "critically important" in ensuring Taiwan's ability to defend itself.

Meanwhile, China's military kept silent on Friday on its large deployment of naval and coast guard ships off Taiwan this week, with its top spokesperson quoting an ancient strategist instead.

Taiwanese officials have said that China was simulating a blockade with one string of ships off the island and a second one farther out at sea, in waters between Japan's Okinawa islands and the northern Philippines.

The Chinese Defence Ministry's first public comment on the activity was essentially a no comment.

Wu Qian, the ministry's top spokesperson, included a famous quote from "The Art of War", an ancient Chinese text on warfare strategy, in his remarks. The quote says military tactics adapt to changing conditions, just as flowing water does. Qian then said that the military will decide whether to hold an exercise based on its needs and the situation. —PTI

IMRAN, WIFE FACE NEW CORRUPTION CASE

ISLAMABAD, 13 DEC

Former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi were indicted in a new corruption case on Thursday. The case, which is the third graft reference against them, revolves around the purchase of an expensive Bulgari jewellery set at a throwaway price, Dawn reported.

This development comes just a week after the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder and other leaders of his party were charged in connection with the attack on the army's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi during last year's May 9 protests.

Although Khan was granted bail in the case by the Islamabad High Court last month, he remains in prison due to multiple charges, dating back to his arrest on 5 August last year, as per Dawn. On Thursday, Special Court Central-I Judge Shahrukh Arjumand presided over the proceedings at Adiala Jail, where Imran was presented. Bushra Bibi, who is on bail in the case, appeared with her counsel. PTI founder and his wife, Bushra Bibi, have denied corruption charges brought against them. Subsequently, the court summoned the prosecution witnesses on 18 December to record their testimonies. *—PTI*

In biggest attack, 93 Russian missiles batter Ukraine

KYIV, 13 DEC

Russia launched a massive aerial attack against Ukraine on Friday, firing 93 cruise and ballistic missiles and almost 200 drones, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, describing it as one of the heaviest bombardments of the country's energy sector since Russia's full-scale invasion almost three years ago.

The Russian military targeted the Ukrainian power grid, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko wrote on his Facebook page. "The enemy continues its terror," he said.

Halushchenko said energy workers do everything necessary to "minimise negative consequences for the energy system," promising to release more details on damages once the security situation allows it.

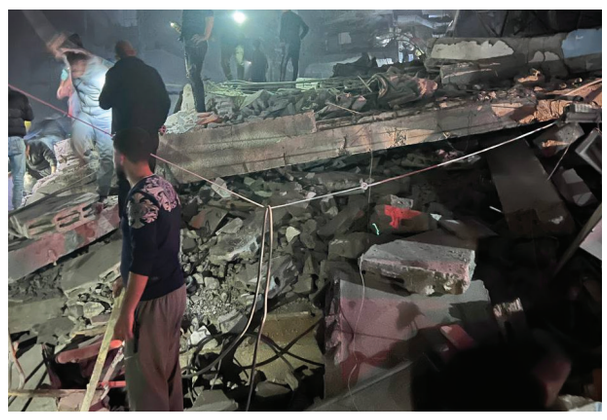
Ukraine's air force reported multiple strike drones launched at Ukraine overnight followed by swarms of cruise missiles in the country's air space. It said Russia also used air-launched ballistic Kinzhal missiles against Ukraine's western regions.

Friday's attack is the latest in a series of such raids that has heightened fears that the Kremlin aims to destroy the country's power generation capacity as the winter sets in.

Since launching its invasion in February 2022, Russia has relentlessly pummelled Ukraine's electricity system, resulting in repeated shutdowns of critical heating and drinking water supplies during the bitter winter months in an apparent attempt to break Ukrainian spirits and resolve. *—PTI*

- Friday's attack is the latest in a series of such raids that has heightened fears that the Kremlin aims to destroy the country's power generation capacity as the winter sets in.

Russia targets Ukraine's energy infrastructure with massive drone and missile attack PHOTO: X@FRANCE24_EN



Palestinian medics also reported that over 40 people were receiving treatment at two hospitals PHOTO: X

Israel kills 25 in Gaza as US pushes for ceasefire

WAR WATCH RUSSIA-UKRAINE, ISRAEL-GAZA

- Palestinian medics also reported that over 40 people, most of them children, were receiving treatment at the two hospitals.

DEIR AL-BALAH, 13 DEC

An Israeli airstrike has hit the central Gaza Strip, killing at least 25 Palestinians and wounding dozens more, Palestinian medics said, just hours after President Joe Biden's national security adviser raised hopes about a ceasefire deal to end the war in Gaza.

Officials at two hospitals in the Gaza Strip, al-Awda Hospital in the north and al-Aqsa Hospital in central Gaza, reported they received a combined total of 25 bodies from an Israeli strike on a multi-storey residential building in the urban Nuseirat refugee camp on Thursday.

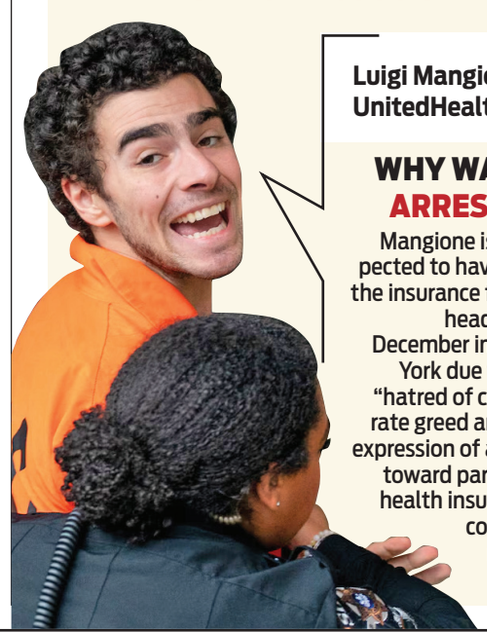
Palestinian medics also reported that over 40 people, most of them children, were receiving treatment at the two hospitals. The al-Aqsa Hospital said that the Israeli attack also damaged several nearby houses in Nuseirat.

The bombardment came just hours after Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, told reporters in Jerusalem that Israel's ceasefire in Lebanon has helped clear the way for another deal to end the war in Gaza. He plans to travel next to Qatar and Egypt, key mediators in the ceasefire talks, as the Biden administration makes a final push on negotiations before Donald Trump is inaugurated.

Sullivan said "Hamas' posture at the negotiating table did adapt" after Israel decimated the leadership of its ally Hezbollah in Lebanon and reached a ceasefire there. *—PTI*

UNITEDHEALTH CEO'S MURDER

From 'killer' to hero: The social media rise of Luigi Mangione



Luigi Mangione, a 26-year-old Italian-American computer scientist and University of Pennsylvania graduate, arrested in the alleged murder of UnitedHealth CEO Bryan Thompson, has become a social media sensation. A commonly asked question is, "Is he a hero? A killer? Or both?"

WHY WAS HE ARRESTED?

Mangione is suspected to hot the insurance firm's head on 4 December in New York due to his "hatred of corporate greed and an expression of anger toward parasitic health insurance companies."

NETIZENS GO GAGA OVER MANGIONE

- His mugshot went viral on Instagram and TikTok.
- Netizens call him the 'hot assassin' and a martyr.
- Gained 26,000 followers after arrest
- Fans call upon celebrity Kim Kardashian to get him out of jail.
- His "fans" fundraise $31,000 for his legal defence

LUIGI CRYPTO COINS

Cryptocurrency fans are spending millions on "meme coins" related to Luigi. These coins, listed on sites like pump.fun, have names like "Free Luigi Mangione" and "Justice for Luigi Mangione." One coin, called "Luigi", launched on 9 December, the same day Mangione was charged with murder in New York, reached a $76 million market value.

JACKETS SOLD OUT

The sale of the Levi's Sherpa Lined Two-Pocket Hooded Trucker Jacket, worn by Liugu during the murder, has skyrocketed, with 700 jackets sold within just two days.

NEW YORKERS HOST LOOKALIKE CONTEST

New York youth took their obsession with Luigi to new heights by holding a lookalike contest on 7 December. Video footage shows several people lined up at Washington Square Park, dressed in outfits resembling those of the suspected shooter.

Rupee recovers 10P to end at 84.78 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

The rupee rebounded from its all-time low level and settled with a gain of 10 paise at 84.78 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, buoyed by a strong recovery in domestic equity markets and easing inflation data. However, a strengthening American currency overseas and foreign fund outflows restricted the positive bias in the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.87 and touched the intra-day high of 84.77 against the greenback. The unit finally ended the session at 84.78 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a gain of 10 paise from its previous closing level. On Thursday, the rupee fell 5 paise to settle at the lowest-ever level of 84.88 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.06 per cent at 106.70. —*PTI*

Mkt stages strong comeback amid easing inflation

Sensex recovered all lost ground and jumped 843.16 points

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended sharply higher on Friday amid heavy buying in telecommunication stocks and encouraging domestic inflation data.

After falling 1,207.14 points in morning trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex recovered all the lost ground later and jumped 843.16 points or 1.04 per cent to settle at 82,133.12. During the day, it surged 923.96 points or 1.13 per cent to 82,213.92.

The NSE Nifty climbed 219.60 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 24,768.30 after falling 367.9 points in intra-day trade.

Among the 30-share Sensex blue-chip pack, Bharti Airtel, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Titan, UltraTech Cement, HCL Technologies, and Power Grid, were the biggest gainers.

Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, JSW Steel and Bajaj Finserv were the laggards.

Nifty climbed 219.60 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 24,768.30 ***PHOTO: X***

Retail inflation declined in November to 5.48 per cent and came within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone mainly due to easing food prices, creating headroom for a rate cut at the central bank's rate-setting panel meeting under new Governor Sanjay Malhotra in February.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based headline inflation was at 6.21 per cent in October and 5.55 per cent in November 2023.

India's industrial production (IIP) growth slowed to 3.5 per cent year-on-year in October 2024, mainly due to poor performance of mining, power and manufacturing, as per official data released on Thursday.

30-share BSE benchmark declined 236.18 points or 0.29 per cent to settle at 81,289.96 on Thursday. The Nifty dropped 93.10 points or 0.38 per cent to 24,548.70. —*PTI*

U TURN

Minister: No issues with Adani funding Colombo Port

COLOMBO, 13 DEC

Bimal Rathnayaka ***PHOTO: INSTAGRAM***

The Sri Lankan government wants to see the deep-water container terminal project at the Colombo port go ahead and has no issue with the Adani-led conglomerate using its own resources to fund it, ports minister Bimal Rathnayaka has said.

In an exchange filing late on Tuesday, Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd said the project "is on track for commissioning by early next year" and added that the company will fund the ongoing project through "internal accruals", aligning with its capital strategy.

"It is a very important project for revenue generation for the port, we are keen to see it going ahead," Rathnayaka told He said the Adani group's decision to reject funding from the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) was its own and Sri Lanka had no issues with it.

DFC financing was part of the US government's broader efforts to counter China's growing influence in the region and was seen as an endorsement of Adani's ability to develop world-class infrastructure. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Gold, silver prices slump amid heavy selling by jewellers

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Gold and silver prices slumped in the national capital on Friday, with the precious metal plummeting to below the Rs 80,000-mark due to heavy selling by jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Besides, a weak trend in the international markets weighed down heavily on the bullion prices, traders said. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity dived Rs 1,400 to Rs 79,500 per 10 grams. It had finished at Rs 80,900 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver plummeted Rs 4,200 to Rs 92,800 per kg, marking the single biggest fall in the month of December. On Thursday, the white metal ended at Rs 97,000 per kg in the previous trading session. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity also declined Rs 1,400 to Rs 79,100 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 80,500 per 10 grams. —*PTI*

Yesmadam: No one fired, campaign to highlight stress

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

After beauty services platform YesMadam faced backlash on Monday over a purported internal email leaked on social media suggesting the termination of staff who indicated workplace stress, the company co-founder on Friday clarified that no staff was fired and called it a marketing initiative "to shed light on workplace stress and mental health". YesMadam Co-Founder Mayank Arya in a note said the intent behind the campaign was to highlight an important issue, but it inadvertently triggered negative reactions. He added that the campaign was conceptualised with the genuine objective of raising awareness about mental health challenges in corporate and startup environments. —*PTI*

Passenger vehicle dispatches up 4% in Nov: SIAM

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Passenger vehicle dispatches from companies to dealerships rose 4 per cent year on year to 3,47,522 units in November, industry body SIAM said on Friday. The overall passenger vehicle dispatches stood at 3,33,833 units in November last year. Two-wheeler wholesales, however, declined by 1 per cent year on year to 16,04,749 units last month as compared with 16,23,399 units in the same month last year. Total three-wheeler dispatches also witnessed a 1 per cent year on year dip to 59,350 units in November, Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) said in a statement. —*PTI*

IN NOVEMBER

SIP inflows surge 39%; MF AUM crosses ₹68L cr

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Mutual Fund (MF) industry in India has achieved significant milestones as Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) flows surged 39 per cent in November, compared to the same period last year, said a report by Motilal Oswal.

The report noted that with assets under management (AUM) crossing Rs 68 lakh crore the Monthly SIP contributions in November this year stood at Rs 25,320 crore, showcasing the growing popularity of this investment route among retail investors.

It said "Mutual Fund Industry crossed Rs 68 lakh cr AUM, Monthly SIP flows at Rs 25,320 cr, Mutual Fund AUM and SIP Flows are up 48 and 39 per cent in last 1 year respectively".

The mutual fund industry has witnessed robust growth over the past year, with total AUM increasing by 48 per cent.

The report also shared that SIP flows have outpaced non-SIP monthly gross flows, growing at 48 per cent compared to the 12 per cent growth in non-SIP flows during the same period.

While non-SIP flows saw a dip in November, SIP contributions accounted for approximately two per cent of the total inflows into mutual funds.

Since March 2021, the total mutual fund AUM has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 23 per cent. Equity mutual funds have been a major contributor, accounting for 45 per cent of the total AUM. —*PTI*

ISG gets RBI nod to operate as payment operator

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

JP-Morgan-backed fintech company In-Solutions Global (ISG) has secured full authorisation as a payment aggregator under the Reserve Bank of India's regulatory framework.

The approval further empowers ISG to streamline digital payments for merchants across various sectors, ensuring fast, secure, and reliable transactions while advancing financial inclusion, the fintech said in a release.

The company currently processes over 28 billion transactions annually, serving more than 70 per cent of banks.

Adelia Castelino, Managing Director, said: "It strengthens our position as a trusted partner, enabling us to power enterprises and SMBs with cutting-edge, scalable payment solutions."

The company further said the licence complements ISG's growing portfolio, including its prepaid payment instrument (PPI) licence, enabling it to offer an integrated suite of payment solutions spanning online platforms, retail transactions, transit. —*PTI*

Indian companies will be subject to a higher withholding tax on income generated in Switzerland ***PHOTO: X***

Switzerland scraps MFN status to India

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Switzerland has withdrawn the MFN status granted to India following an adverse court ruling against Nestle, a move that will result in adverse tax implications for Indian entities operating in the European nation. With this, from 1 January, 2025, Indian companies will be subject to a higher withholding tax on income generated in Switzerland. In a statement, Switzerland announced suspension of the application of the most favoured nation (MFN) clause of the protocol to the agreement between the Swiss Confederation and the Republic of India for the avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income. This means that Switzerland will tax dividends that Indian entities will earn in that country at 10 per cent from 1 January, 2025. — *PTI*

SpiceJet: Cleared ₹160 cr pending employee PF dues

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

SpiceJet on Friday said it has cleared all employee provident fund dues worth Rs 160.07 crore that were pending for over two years.

The low-cost carrier, which has been facing multiple headwinds, recently raised Rs 3,000 crore, following which it has been clearing statutory, GST (Goods and Services Tax) and other dues.

Employee provident fund dues amounting to Rs 160.07 crore, spanning over two years, have been cleared, the airline said in a release.

According to the release, since October, SpiceJet has been utilising its internal cash flows to meet its statutory obligations, including provident fund and TDS (Tax Deduction at Source) payments, the release said. —*PTI*

Goyal Salt set to open ₹80 cr plant in Gandhidham

JAIPUR, 13 DEC

Goyal Salt Limited, a leading FMCG player, has set up a Rs 80-crore salt manufacturing plant in Gandhidham, near salt the capital of Kutch. Spread over 12 acres of land, the plant with a capacity of 4,50,000MT is on a trial run and is expected to be operational by end of January 2025.

Once the plant becomes operational, Goyal Salt will become the largest player in natural salt in India.

Besides the Gandhidham plant, the company has one unit in Nawa City. Set up on a 15-acre premises, this plant is solely dedicated for salt refining, raw salt storage and refined salt packaging. It has an annual capacity of 2,10,000 MT.

Goyal Salt currently has presence in Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The company is aiming at a spot among the top-three salt brands in India, as it continues to strengthen the brand in Western part of the country like Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Goyal Salt will become the largest player in natural salt in India once the plant becomes operational in Gujarat ***PHOTO: X***

Pramesh Goyal, Managing Director said, "The new Gandhidham facility represents an investment of ₹80 crore. The plant is equipped with cutting-edge technology and infrastructure designed to meet the high standards of salt production. This new plant is a key step in our expansion, fostering growth in Western and Eastern parts of the country like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha and Assam."

India is currently the third largest salt producing country, a position that reflects its strong performance and growth potential. —*PTI*

Infra in 10 years surpasses 60 years of govt work: Scindia

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Infrastructure built in the last 10 years is more than the work done under 60 years of the previous regime, union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Friday.

Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region Scindia told reporters that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the government has developed infrastructure with a focus on quality, speed, quantity and coverage.

"There has been a 180-degree change in the infrastructure after 2014. The Prime Minister dedicated 15 Airports in a single day on March 10. The speed of infrastructure development in the last 10 years has been unmatched, unseen and unprecedented. Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh did not get any airport in 65 years. Today Sikkim has an airport and there are four airports in Arunachal," Scindia said.

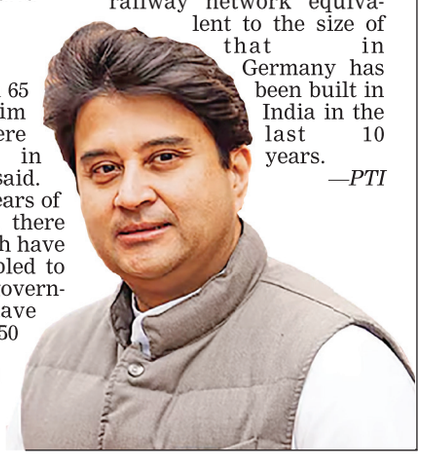
- He said that in 70 years of the previous regime, there were 74 airports which have been more than doubled to 157 under the Modi government and fleets have increased to around 750 from 400

He said that in 70 years of the previous regime, there were 74 airports which have been more than doubled to 157 under the Modi government and fleets have increased to around 750 from 400.

The minister said that the budget allocation for road, railways and aviation infrastructure has increased leaps and bounds in the last 10 years.

He said that capital expenditure of around Rs 11.5 lakh crore earmarked in the union budget is equivalent to GDP of some of the 10-12 countries.

The minister said that a railway network equivalent to the size of that in Germany has been built in India in the last 10 years. —*PTI*



BOOMING ECONOMY

GST records over 9% boost until Nov

NEW DELHI, DEC

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections have gone up by 9.3 per cent so far in fiscal 2024–25 to Rs 14.56 lakh crore. In the April–November period of last year, the tax mop-up was Rs 13.32 lakh crore.

The surge in recent GST collections reflects a positive trajectory for India's economy, underscoring robust domestic consumption and buoyant import activity. The figures bode well for the country's fiscal health and economic recovery efforts, signalling resilience amidst global uncertainties.

In April this year, the total GST mop-up surged to a record high of Rs 2.10 lakh crore.

PHOTO: ANI

During the financial year 2023–24, the total gross GST collection was recorded at Rs 20.18 lakh crore, an 11.7 per cent increase compared to the previous fiscal.

Also, to give relief to the taxpayers, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes has relaxed rules to ensure that accrued interest and penalties are avoided for GST demands for 2017–18 to 2019–20. If you have received a demand notice for these fiscal years, you can avoid interest and penalties by paying the full tax amount due by March 2025.

Further, GST rates have been exempted for rectified spirit, platform tickets, retiring rooms, cloakroom services, intra railway transactions, infrastructure usage and maintenance services between Indian Railways and SPVs.

GST has also been exempted on accommodation services on stays valued up to Rs 20,000 per month for a minimum of 90 days; incentives on RuPay Cards and low-value on BHIM-UPI by Banks. —*PTI*

'Plans afoot to bring EPFO service at par with banking'

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Subscribers of the retirement fund body EPFO may soon be able to get services at par with banking system and use ATMs to withdraw their claim amount, a top official said on Friday.

Union Labour Secretary Sumita Dawra told PTI that focus right now in EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation) is to improve the IT infrastructure.

"While improvements are being seen in last few months, in January 2025 we will see more improvement coming in as a result of hardware upgradation," she said.

The secretary said that the efforts are being made to bring systemic reforms that make processes easier and efficient.

Under the new system, claimants, beneficiaries or insured individuals will be able to access their claim amounts through ATMs.

A maximum of Rs 7 lakh is provided under the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) scheme run by the EPFO to the heirs of deceased subscribers.

In the new system, the heir of the deceased EPFO subscriber may also be able to use ATMs to withdraw the money after claim settlement. —*PTI*

GUKESH'S DAY AS WORLD CHAMPION: TROPHY & STARDOM

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin announces Rs 5 crore cash prize

Seeing it up close for the first time... I don't want to touch it, I want to lift it at the closing ceremony
—D Gukesh, Chess World Champion

SINGAPORE, 13 DEC

His eyes were expectedly burning after a sleepless night but the adrenaline kept D Gukesh going as he smiled through a plethora of engagements, including signing hundreds of autographs, before finally getting his hands on the world chess championship trophy a day after becoming its youngest owner.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday announced a cash prize of Rs five crore to D Gukesh, in recognition of the latter becoming the youngest world chess champion.

The 18-year-old Chennai-lad got the better of defending champion Ding Liren of China on Thursday for the historic triumph that made him the 18th overall and only the second Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the crown that came with a whooping prize of USD 1.3 million.

D Gukesh PHOTO: PTI

The morning after began with getting a glimpse of the trophy, which he refused to touch as he wanted to wait till the closing ceremony in the evening. He finally held it after it was presented to him by FIDE (International Chess Federation) President Arkady Dvorkovich.

In his introduction, the FIDE presenters spoke of his "brilliant poise" and, "performance for the ages" that he delivered against an older and more experienced rival.

"I mean this moment, it feels like I have lived it a million times. Every morning when I woke up, this moment was the reason I woke up. To hold this trophy and this reality means more than anything else in my life," the graceful teenager said in his acceptance speech after being presented with his gold medal and the trophy that came with a USD 1.3 million reward.

He reiterated his gratitude towards his opponent for challenging him, his parents for being there for him, his team, the host country, the many new fans he acquired over the course of past three weeks and the almighty.

"When I couldn't see solution, God was the only one who could pull me through and show me way," he said. —*PTI*

It was a moment for us to remember all the sacrifices we made

—J Padmakumari, D Gukesh's mother

Gukesh has incredible powers of self-awareness and a lot of our work was helping him identify what were the things that would potentially distract his focus

Paddy Upton, Mental conditioning coach

It (criticism) comes with every match. To be honest, I think it just comes with the territory. You ignore it and that's all

Vishwanathan Anand

Carlsen lauds Gukesh, rules out world title clash with him

World number one Magnus Carlsen has lauded D Gukesh for making the most of his chances to be crowned the youngest ever world chess champion but has ruled out the possibility of a title showdown with him as desired by the Indian teen. Carlsen said he was a bit surprised by how the match unfolded with most of the games ending in draw. "Obviously playing against Magnus in the world championship would be amazing, it would be the toughest challenge there is in chess. It is up to Magnus." But Carlsen ruled that out. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

FIDE Chief: Mistakes are natural in sports

SINGAPORE, 13 DEC

International Chess Federation (FIDE) President Arkady Dvorkovich on Friday said mistakes by players make the sport exciting, downplaying the criticism around the quality of just-concluded World Championship match between India's D Gukesh and China's Ding Liren.

The 18-year-old Gukesh made history by becoming the youngest player to win the world title.

Former world champion Vladimir Kramnik was not impressed with the quality of chess on display during the match, calling it the "end of chess as we know it."

Kramnik expressed his frustration over the game's quality, calling a critical blunder by Ding Liren "childish".

In his reaction, Kramnik wrote on 'X', "No comment. Sad. End of chess as we know it. Never yet has a WC title been decided by such a childish one-move blunder."

Five-time champion, Norway's Magnus Carlsen too has been critical of quality in earlier rounds. —*PTI*

Wawrinka receives wild card for Australian open

MELBOURNE, 13 DEC

Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka has received one of nine wild cards for the upcoming Australian Open, which commences on 12 January. Tennis Australia announced that Wawrinka will be joined in Melbourne Park by fellow Australians Tristan Schoolkate, Li Tu, James McCabe, Daria Saville, Ajla Tomljanovic, Emerson Jones, Talia Gibson, and Maya Joint. Wawrinka famously claimed the Australian Open title in 2014, defeating the recently-retired Rafael Nadal in four sets to secure his first Grand Slam singles honour. The 39-year-old Swiss player has faced recent injury struggles but reached the quarter-finals in Melbourne in 2020, marking his last major quarter-final appearance. "I'm incredibly grateful to receive a wild card into the Australian Open in 2025," Wawrinka said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Barcelona secures quarterfinal spot in WCL

STOCKHOLM, 13 DEC

Two-time defending champions Barcelona sealed their place in the Women's Champions League quarter-finals with a commanding 3-0 victory over Hammarby in Stockholm on Thursday. Ewa Pajor opened the scoring with two close-range goals in the first half, and Aitana Bonmatí put the result beyond doubt with a third goal ten minutes from time. After a disappointing start with a 2-0 defeat to Manchester City, Barcelona rebounded spectacularly, netting 23 goals while conceding only one in their subsequent four group matches. Manchester City maintained their perfect record by defeating St. Pölten 2-0, leading Group D with 15 points, while Barcelona sits three points adrift ahead of their upcoming clash against City next Wednesday. In Group C, Arsenal maintained pressure on leaders Bayern Munich, beating Vålerenga 3-1, courtesy of two goals from Alessia Russo and a strike from Frida Maanum. Bayern top the group after a dominant 4-0 win over Juventus. —*PTI*

ICC approves hybrid model for Champions Trophy 2025

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has approved a hybrid model for hosting the 2025 Champions Trophy. Under this arrangement, Pakistan will host the majority of the tournament matches, while Dubai will host select games to accommodate teams unwilling to travel to Pakistan due to security concerns.

This decision comes as part of the ICC's efforts to ensure a smooth and inclusive tournament while addressing logistical and safety challenges. Pakistan was initially named the sole host for the Champions Trophy, marking a significant moment as it would be the first ICC event hosted by the country since 1996. However, apprehensions from some cricket boards about traveling to Pakistan led to the adoption of this hybrid format.

PHOTO: ICC

Dubai, a prominent cricket hub, will serve as the alternative venue for matches involving teams reluctant to play in Pakistan. The ICC and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) aim to ensure the event's success while maintaining the integrity of the sport.

Further details, including the schedule and participating teams, will be announced in the coming months.

The 2025 Champions Trophy is scheduled to take place from 19 February to 9 March, with eight teams divided into two groups. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals, followed by the final. This hybrid hosting format echoes the approach used during the Men's 50-over Asia Cup last year, where Pakistan hosted the tournament. India's matches, including the semifinal and final, were held in Colombo. —*Agencies*

Gillespie resigns, Aaqib will be Pak's Test coach

LAHORE, 13 DEC

Jason Gillespie has resigned from his position as head coach of Pakistan's Test team, with former pacer Aaqib Javed appointed as his successor for the upcoming two-match series against South Africa, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced on Thursday. The Tests are scheduled to commence on 26 December, as the squad is currently in South Africa for the white-ball segment of the tour.

Aaqib Javed, who has been serving as the interim coach for Pakistan's white-ball teams, will step into this pivotal role. Gillespie's resignation comes ahead of his contract's expiration in 2026, triggered by the PCB's failure to review the contract of Nielsen, —*PTI*

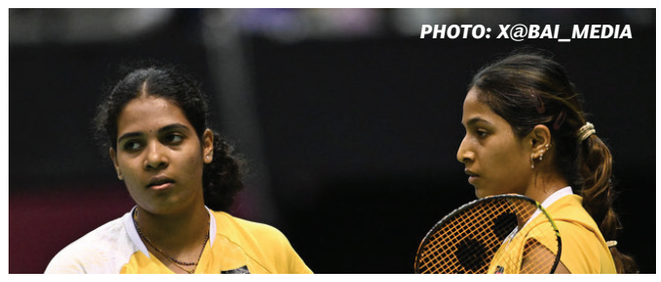


PHOTO: X@BAI_MEDIA

Treesa-Gayatri out of BWF world tour finals

HANGZHOU, 13 DEC

The Indian women's doubles team of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand faced disappointment in their quest for a semifinal spot at the BWF World Tour Finals, losing to Japan's Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida in straight games during their final Group A match on Friday.

The pair, who recently secured their first BWF Super 300 title at the Syed Modi International in Lucknow, were defeated 17-21, 13-21 by the world number four Japanese duo in just 49 minutes. This marked their fourth defeat against the bronze medallists from the Paris Olympics, with only one victory in their five encounters.

As the sole representatives from India in the prestigious season-ending tournament, Treesa and Gayatri knew they needed a win to advance to the knockout stage. Their journey began with a narrow loss to the top-seeded Chinese pair, Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning, before they achieved a commendable victory over Malaysia's Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan, which kept their hopes alive.

However, against Matsuyama and Shida, the Indian pair managed to stay level at 5-5 but soon fell behind as the Japanese players surged to an 18-10 lead. Despite narrowing the gap to 17-19, they could not clinch the first game. In the second game, Matsuyama and Shida will now join Sheng Shu and Ning in the semifinals. —*PTI*

BGT: Onus on Rohit, Kohli in battle Brisbane

BRISBANE, 13 DEC

Rohit Sharma's elegance and Virat Kohli's class will face the ultimate "Test" when India take on an Australian team eager to set the record straight on a spicy Gabba track in the third game of the Border-Gavaskar series, starting Saturday.

With the series locked at 1–1, Brisbane could well decide the course of the rubber and whether Rohit's men would continue to be the master of their fate in the ongoing World Test Championship.

In bowling, India has Jasprit Bumrah, who has made every other bowler in the series look pedestrian in his comparison.

Shubman Gill admitted the fall of wickets at the other end affected his game in the Adelaide Test but expressed confidence that the Indian batting group would deliver a stronger first-innings effort in what is now effectively a three-match series.

PHOTO: PTI

Meanwhile, Australian captain Pat Cummins promised to inundate Indian batters with bouncers at "some point."

On the other hand, Cummins announced that pacer Josh Hazlewood will replace Scott Boland —*PTI*

TEAMS

Australia (Playing XI): Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh, Alex Carey (wk), Pat Cummins, Mitch Starc, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood.

India squad: Rohit Sharma (c), Jasprit Bumrah (vc), Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Devdutt Padikkal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Siraj, Akash Deep, Prasidh Krishna, Harshit Rana, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Washington Sundar.

Reserves: Mukesh Kumar, Navdeep Saini, Khaleel Ahmed, Yash Dayal.

Match starts at 5:50 am IST.

TENNIS' VISHNU CALLS FOR AITA TALKS

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Dragging the national federation to court is not the right approach, says Olympian and veteran tennis player Vishnu Vardhan, who advocated the formation of a players' council for better co-ordination with national federation as AITA stands crippled due to a petition filed by Somdev Devvarman and Purav Raja. Devvarman, one of finest singles players to emerge from India, and a decent doubles exponent Raja sought a stay on the recent AITA elections, challenging the eligibility of a few candidates.

The court allowed the elections but stopped the declaration of results. It did not allow the new team to take over the AITA administration. —*PTI*

Six Indian women golfers reach LET final

MARRAKECH, 13 DEC

Amandeep Drall and Avani Prashanth are among six Indian women golfers who have successfully qualified for the Final Stage of the Lalla Aicha Q-School after a competitive 54-hole Pre-qualifiers. A total of 101 golfers have progressed to the Final Stage, which will unfold over five rounds at the Royal Golf Marrakech and Al Maaden Golf Marrakech venues from 16-20 December.

Among the Indian contingent, Sneha Singh delivered the standout performance with rounds of 69-73-75, finishing in a tie for fourth place. Drall achieved a solid score of 71-73-70, landing her in a tie for fifth position, while Prashanth concluded her rounds at 73-72-72, securing a tied ninth.

Vidhatri Urs, who initially shared the lead at Samanah Club after the first day, slipped to tied 14th with rounds of 68-77-75, concluding the event at 4-over par.

In the overall standings, American golfer Annika Borrelli clinched victory by five shots at Noria Golf Club. Meanwhile, New Zealand's Amelia Garvey and French amateur Vanessa Bouvet led at Golf Club Rotana, while Ireland's Anna Foster, American Zoe Slaughter, and Welsh amateur Darcey Harry shared the top spot at Palm Golf Ourika. At Samanah, Australia's Justice Bosio, Nigeria's Georgia Iziemgbe Oboh, and Iceland's Ragga Kristinsdottir finished their week in a tie. —*PTI*

PROFIT DIPS

Man City reports record revenues

MANCHESTER, 13 DEC

Manchester City on Friday reported record revenues of 715 million pounds ($903 million) for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Revenues were up by 2.2 million pounds ($2.78 million) on the previous year, but profits were down slightly — 73.8 million pounds ($93.2 million) compared to £80.4 million ($101.5 million).

"The club's three primary income sources — commercial, broadcast and matchday — all remained strong, reflecting the continued differentiation and impact of the club's multi-decade strategic approach," City said in a statement.

City was taken over by the ruling family of Abu Dhabi in 2008 and has has gone on to dominate English soccer after spending billions of pounds on some of the world's best players and hiring Pep Guardiola as manager in 2016.

PHOTO: X@MANCITY

City won a record fourth straight Premier League title last year and has been crowned English champion in six of the last seven years.

But it is currently struggling on the pitch both domestically and in the Champions League, and City's financial report comes against the backdrop of a hearing on alleged financial breaches. The four-time defending champion is facing more than 100 charges by the Premier League ranging over a nine-year period when it was trying to establish itself as the biggest force in English soccer.

City was accused by the league of providing misleading information about its finances from 2009-18. A hearing by an independent commission began in September and a verdict is not expected until next year. —*PTI*

MAN U SECURES 2-1 WIN AGAINST PLZEN

LONDON, 13 DEC

Rasmus Hojlund scored twice after coming off the bench and Manchester United rallied to beat Viktoria Plzen 2–1 in the Europa League.

The Denmark striker netted in the 88th minute after collecting Bruno Fernandes' pass off a free kick to seal the victory and put United into the top eight of the standings. Hojlund replaced Marcus Rashford in the 56th and scored an equaliser six minutes later, after Amad Diallo's shot was deflected by goalkeeper Martin Jedlicka into his path for an easy finish.

Hojlund also scored twice in the previous round, when United beat Norwegian team Bodø/Glimt 3–2, and has five goals in his six appearances in second-tier competition.. —*PTI*